Pavan K. Varma

BECOMING INDIAN

The Unfinished Revolution of CULTURE and IDENTITY



BECOMING INDIAN

The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity

Pavan K. Varma

ALLEN LANE
an imprint of
PENGUIN BOOKS

ALLEN LANE
Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi 110 017, India
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario,
M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell,
Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Group (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,
Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in Allen Lane by Penguin Books India 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 9780670083466

Typeset in PalmSprings by SÜRYA, New Delhi
Printed at Thomson Press (India) Ltd.

'I do not want to stay in a house with all its windows and doors shut. I want a house with all its windows and doors open where the cultural breezes of all lands and nations blow through my house. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.'

—Mahatma Gandhi

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Till just a few decades ago much of the world was carved into empires, the largest of these being the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish empires. By the mid twentieth century independent countries had emerged from these empires. India's independence on the midnight of 15 August 1947 hastened the demise of colonialism across continents. The world saw the end of the colonial era, and the birth of a world of 'equal' nations.

The end of colonialism did not, however, signal the end of its consequences. The popular—and much celebrated—belief in India was that with the Tricolour replacing the Union Jack, a new phase of history had entirely, and definitively, replaced the old. This was, of course, the case politically; but in the field of culture and ideas history does not unfold in watertight compartments. There is a spill-over, a legacy that remains to be interrogated and dismantled. It is the unfinished business of the aftermath of Empire.

This is especially so because the empires of the past were not only about the physical subjugation of peoples. Their real strength lay in the colonization of minds. Beyond the deserved euphoria of political liberation, there is a need, therefore, for a clear analysis of the effects of Empire on the culture and creative processes of newly, or relatively newly, independent nations. However, this is a very neglected area of study. Colonialism is studied for its political and economic impact, but rarely deeply investigated for its cultural and ideological consequences that continue to hold formerly subject people in thrall.

The legacies of the past have an incredibly powerful momentum; they persist in a hundred myriad ways, affecting our language, beliefs, behaviour, self-esteem, creative expression, politics and everyday interactions. It is not often recognized how culturally disruptive the colonial experience is. Those who have never been colonized can never really know what it does to the psyche of a people. Those who *have* been are often not fully aware of—or are unwilling to accept—the degree to which they have been compromised.

The authentic re-appropriation of one's cultural space is thus one of the most critical unfinished agendas of our time. But the task is doubly difficult because even as we grapple with the consequences of the past, a new present is taking shape in the form of globalization. The fact of globalization is a given; it is an irreversible process, and in many respects not without benefit. But in the field of culture and identity it is not a neutral process. There is a dominant cultural paradigm largely fashioned by those who were the rulers in the past, and who continue to have the technology and wealth to propagate their message. In some respects, it is an even more powerful Empire because, while shorn of overt political domination, it is more pervasive, more intrusive and relentless. As a result, people who have not yet dismantled the legacies of their colonial past are also prone to becoming the victims of the inequities of the present. In this double jeopardy—where past empires reconfigure themselves as new cultural hegemonies—the victim is usually the last to know.

This book is an attempt to understand this process, and seeks to do so rigorously but calmly, without xenophobic or chauvinistic anger. Its principal concern is that great cultural civilizations like India cannot become derivative, or reduce themselves to caricature or mimicry, measuring their progress solely by economic statistics. In the past we were an example of civilizational excellence, and we must endeavour to be the same again, capable of original and independent thinking. But this will require, first and foremost, an understanding of what the intervening period of colonialism did to us in the realms of language, culture and creativity. Only if the impact of that past is understood can we grapple with the forces of co-option and asymmetry at work today, and re-appropriate our culture authentically and with dignity—without which it is absurd to talk of global leadership.

One of the great myths spawned by globalization is that we are all becoming mirror images of each other. Of course, there is now much greater give and take between nations and societies than perhaps at any other time in human history. But cultures retain their indelible differences, and that *diversity* must be respected. Cultures are products of a specific space and milieu, they are not interchangeable, and while they do evolve, they cannot be co-opted mindlessly as part of some global, cosmopolitan generality. The need for vigilance against such a possibility is all the greater because—again, contrary to the popular myth about globalization—cultural interactions *don't* have a level playing field.

Culture and identity will be the dominant agenda of the 21st century. As people across the world begin to dismantle the impositions of the past—or at least one hopes that they will—and begin to question the silent co-option inherent in globalization, they will challenge many of the easy assumptions of the present global order. This is an important and necessary process. The alternative is subterranean resentments building up and expressing themselves in retrogressive ways, including the lurch towards fundamentalism.

~

In analyzing the impact of colonialism in the field of culture and identity, I have naturally focused on the India-Britain interaction. But this particular relationship is a template to understand what happened in varying degrees to all colonized people. The book begins on an autobiographical note, because personal histories cannot be separated from the operation of historical forces. The succeeding chapters deal with the pivotal issues of language, architecture and the arts, colonial amnesia, the strength and evolution of India's cultural traditions, and the current state of our culture.

Former colonial powers, too, must learn to live with the consequences of colonialism—Britain, for instance, has significant minorities from the Empire living within its borders now. For these immigrant minorities, the question of identity is of seminal importance, and the penultimate chapter of the book discusses this dilemma of identity. The final chapter analyses the nature of globalization in the area of culture, the symptoms of inequity inherent in it, and the dangers of co-option in our globalizing world.

1

CHOOSING EXILE

My father was born in Ghazipur, a small town on the banks of the Ganga, a little east of the holy city of Varanasi or Benares. The year must have been 1915 and the month possibly August, but I have no proof of the exact date. In those days parents often gave a different date for admission to school; the real date of birth with the exact time was used to draw up the horoscope, but I can't trace that of my father. Not that it matters any more, for he has long been dead. My grandfather, then an upcoming lawyer, named his son Badrinath, after the eponymous pilgrimage town at 3000 metres in the Himalayas, where the great philosopher-saint Shankaracharya re-established the idol of Vishnu in the ninth century AD.

How significant are these bare facts in the context of my father's life? Does it matter where one is born? What hold does a place have on you? How is it different in essence to what is elsewhere? The basic elements cannot change: earth, mud, water, soil, grass, rock, the plains or the mountains or the sea. Ghazipur was a nondescript town, a dot on the sprawling plains of north India, which themselves were part of a larger subcontinent which in turn was part of an even larger Asia, and Asia was connected by land and by sea to other continents. The world is globalized by its very nature; any journey carried to one end will lead to the same spot eventually.

And yet, for my father Ghazipur was home like no other place could be. He grew up there and went to the City High School, wearing a khaki shirt and pyjamas, and learnt to first read and write in Urdu and in Hindi. Though my grandfather was at the time learning to speak English in order to make a mark in the courts set up by the British, it was only in the sixth grade that my father was introduced to the language of the rulers, which had already become more powerful than all the languages of India put together. At home the family spoke Bhojpuri, the local dialect of the region. The elders knew English, but spoke it rarely within the family; when they had to, they did so competently but awkwardly, their writing and speech full of big words, as if to overcompensate for their linguistic insecurity. The family library consisted almost entirely of English books.

Knowledge of English and English manners had become a factor of great consequence, a necessary tool for upward mobility. But in Ghazipur then this did not yet impinge on the self-assured culture of the soil. Seasons came and went, and each had a special significance and was celebrated in ways that had little to do with the Gregorian calendar. Chaitis and horis were sung in Vasant, the short-lived spring; through the long summer months, stress was laid on 'cooling' foods and sherbets, prepared according to recipes handed down from generation to generation; Sawan, the monsoon, was still the season of romance and rejoicing in a manner no Englishman or woman could understand; and the winter months were rich with festivals and new beginnings. There were folk songs in Bhojpuri for every occasion: sohars when a child was born; bannas in praise of the groom and bannis to welcome the bride; and heart-rending bidais when the time came for the bride to leave her parental home.

Much later, after India had gained independence, I remember as a child participating in the kalam–dawaat puja at Ghazipur. On the third day after Diwali, the extended family gathered to pay tribute to Chitragupta, the mythical progenitor of the Kayashta community. Chitragupta had made the use of pen and ink the strength of the Kayasthas—making them not always great men of learning, but munshis, an indispensable breed of clerks needed by both the Mughals and the British. The children were seated on a rug, and on scrolls of paper preserved from the last puja, they wrote *Om Shri Ganeshaya Namah* in Hindi, in obeisance to the god of wisdom. The pen and ink were then blessed with akshat, rice mixed with vermilion, and the papers scrolled up and put back in the box, to be opened the next year when the ceremony would be repeated.

The ritual was a simple one, and perpetuated as an act of memory, continuing a long tradition of belonging. My father was effortlessly a part of this continuity. But, at another level, he was also being torn away from it by the imperatives of the present. To ensure academic excellence and professional success in the Raj, he had to 'liberate' himself from his natural inheritance and prepare for a future which demanded a new 'learning' divorced from his milieu. As a child I was an avid Enid Blyton reader, and I can still recall my initial sense of bewilderment at her description of a glorious summer day when the sun was out without a trace of clouds. How could any child of the Indian plains relate to this and internalize it emotionally? I think now of how much more my father must have had to persevere in order to master Milton and Shakespeare and Wordsworth and Coleridge.

My father went on to win the Dun gold medal in English at Allahabad University, answering questions on English composition, idiom and usage, taking a paper on 'The Growth and Structure of the English Language', learning to do précis writing, and giving a viva voce designed 'to test general reading and command of the language'. The irony is that English as an academic language was not even taught in England until a few decades earlier. In the early Victorian period English schools taught Greek and Latin; there were no professors of English literature in Oxford and Cambridge until the 1870s. But in India, schools had a well-developed curriculum to teach the language of the rulers, and students who wanted to get somewhere had little choice but to learn it. My father, Badrinath, must have spent a great deal of energy over the years to get the highest marks in English literature. In the process, unknown perhaps even to himself, he would have turned away, little by little, from his linguistic and cultural inheritance.

After university, Badrinath prepared to qualify for the ICS, the Indian Civil Service. It was called the 'heaven born' service. Set up by the British in 1872, by 1882 it counted thirty-three members, including one Indian, Behari Lal Gupta, posted as a sessions judge in Bengal. But

Behari Lal and the few Indians who would become magistrates and judges after him would never quite be the equals of their white colleagues. In 1873, a year after the ICS was set up, every British person had been exempted from trial by Indian magistrates. Exactly a decade later, the viceroy, Lord Rippon, proposed the Ilbert Bill that sought to give Indian magistrates the power to try Europeans too. But there was a huge outcry against the move. Annette Beveridge, the wife of Henry Beveridge, one of the more liberal members of the ICS, fumed at the possibility of being judged by the representative of a primitive civilization 'which cares about stone idols, enjoys child marriage and secludes its women, and where at every point the fact of sex is present to the mind'.[1] British supporters of the bill felt that Indians in the ICS had overcome the constraints of climate and the 'prejudice of their race' and had made rather good progress in emulating their rulers. In the end, however, Lord Rippon retreated under the criticism of his countrymen, and the bill when finally enacted, in 1884, allowed for Europeans to demand a trial by jury of which at least half the members were Europeans.

To my father this background—that even those Indians who succeeded in the rigorous ICS exam were treated as inferior by their white counterparts, and that the service itself was created only to further British interests—was not material. The debate about the Ilbert Bill was several years in the past by the time he sat for the exam; few people remembered it or could afford to. Successful colonial policy is about erasing all memory of the origin of events by rationing out privilege and praise that eventually make the consequences of those events acceptable, even desirable. It rids institutions of their historical context, leaving behind only a sense of utility and status, of the opportunities in the present, not the humiliations of the past.

But how can I blame my father for this amnesia? After all, the British-created ICS elite—'more English in thought and feeling than Englishmen themselves',[2] as one British commentator noted approvingly—continued almost without change in independent India. To my father, the ICS signified the highest opportunity provided by the colonial rulers, and he worked very hard to seize it. For months, holed up in the heat of summer at the ancestral haveli in Ghazipur, he worked on mastering British history and English literature, and

improving his English accent and diction. An old woman—one of the servants of the house—sat stoically outside his room for hours; to her toe was tied a rope which, looping into the room through a roshandan, moved a pankha when she moved her foot. The year was 1940. Another war where millions would die was on the anvil. Led by Mahatma Gandhi, the freedom movement—where most political resolutions were drafted in eloquent English—was in full swing. The British did not know it then, but they had only a few more years left in India. In Ghazipur, oblivious to all of this, my father persevered diligently with Wordsworth and Gladstone, having never read Kalidasa or the *Mahabharata*, or learnt Sanskrit, or gone beyond the very basics of his mother tongue, Hindi, or written a single essay in his local dialect, Bhojpuri. In 1941, when the Ganga overflowed its banks after the monsoons, as it did every year, he made it to the ICS.

It was an occasion of great pride for his family, and all of Ghazipur celebrated. At a felicitation ceremony, the students of the City High School presented him a scroll of honour. Decades later, I discovered it quite by chance in one of the locked rooms of the haveli. A dusty ornate frame enclosed a parchment fraying at the edges and moth-eaten in parts. The fading text was addressed to *Badrinath Varma, Esq., M.A., I.C.S. (Selectee)*. 'We, the present students of the City High School of Ghazipur, your old school, offer the most warm-hearted and respectful welcome to you as an elder brother at his return home on achieving entry into the highest of the country's services by success at the stiffest competitive examination in the land,' it began. 'Today, ever to be remembered as a Red Letter Day in the annals of the school, you at our invitation stand before us—the student's highest success personified . . . Hero among heroes of students, you hold up a beacon light for your younger brothers to follow . . . Throughout our student days we shall cherish you as our model which we are resolved to follow. To say more would be an empty vow. Our feelings at the parting moment are too deep for our words . . . Yet the poet's words:

> "Go where Glory awaits thee;
> But, while the fame elates thee,
> Oh! Still remember me" (Moore)

may express part of the feelings, the parting feelings of your brothers.'

The scroll is dated 1 November 1941. As I read it in the deep silence of a room unopened for years, a sense of the surreal gripped me. I could imagine the day when the scroll would have been presented to my father: eager students seated in rows in the school hall, oiled hair carefully combed; my father on the dais in a western tie and suit, a garland of marigolds around his neck; city leaders jostling to greet him; solemn speeches; the citation read to pin-drop silence, followed by thunderous applause. I thought too of the stupendous nature of the transformation in the centuries leading up to this felicitation. In the valley of the Ganga, where the best in Indian civilization had grown and evolved over millennia; not far from Nalanda, one of the oldest centres of learning in the world; a stone's throw away from Benares, where since the dawn of time metaphysicians had debated on the nature of the empirical world and where some of the greatest works in literature and philosophy had been written in Sanskrit and Arabic; here, in the very crucible of this legacy, was the amazing spectacle of its legatees presenting a citation in English whose words they could hardly pronounce, and quoting a poet whom they would never read except with difficulty in compulsory textbooks.

It would be difficult to find a more revealing illustration—as absurd as it is poignant—of the consequence of Empire on the psyche of the ruled, of co-option, of the slow but sure process of 'un-belonging', of people becoming complicit in their own de-culturization and disempowerment.

In the mid-1950s my father went to London to do a year's course at the Imperial Defence College. The family, it was decided, would join him later. When he arrived in London it was the beginning of winter, and it was a new experience for him to be so alone. In India, people crowd around you, even when you want to be alone. Family, relatives and acquaintances feel they have a right to be part of your life. It is a social network that you grow up with and take as given; an invisible masonry that links the individual to the community. London was achingly different. The Indian community was as yet sparse, and the British people, although most civilized, kept social interaction with outsiders to the minimum. Indeed, they believed in leaving you to yourself. It was a cultural difference that my father grappled with inadequately and when the family—my mother, my three elder sisters and I, a year old, with a maid in tow—arrived at 7 Montague Square—the apartment he had hired—he was very relieved. My eldest sister, who was then nine, remembered that on the day they arrived, my father took the three girls to Hyde Park, while my mother and the maid cleaned the apartment, and I slept blissfully through it all.

Almost fifty years later, when I was posted in London, I went back to Montague Square. It was an October morning, cold but sunny, with the russet hush of the onset of autumn. The square consisted of brick-red stucco homes with white windows. My parents' former apartment was on the two top floors, overlooking a garden. Hydrangeas were abloom, a copper beech was aflame, the grass was littered with fallen leaves. A typical English lamp post, ornate in black, holding flower baskets full of begonias and petunias, stood outside the house. I was struck by the silence: not a soul in sight, doors shut, windows closed, cars silent and parked on either side of the square. It must have been much the same fifty years ago, and I don't think my parents got used to it. Silence of this kind is alien to us. Sound is everywhere in India, by turns infuriating and reassuring.

It was, by London standards, a spacious apartment: a living room and three small bedrooms spread over two floors; but much to my mother's discomfiture, there was only one bathroom for the whole family, including, quite unacceptably, the maid. Homes are the most obvious expression of where a people come from; their design is rooted in a specific cultural milieu, and the needs they cater to profile a social context more vividly than most other things. My parents were not used to entering their home by using a key; very often they were locked out because they would not remember to take the key. The apartment had a minuscule balcony, and the maid wanted to know straight away if she could use it to hang the washing.

The girls, then ten, seven and five, adapted more quickly. They were admitted to the neighbouring St Mary's school and picked up a British accent in two months. My eldest sister won a prize in History and English; even in those days she thought she spoke better English than her British friends. At school, there were instructions that they should

not be served beef at lunch; therefore, usually, there was very little to eat, only bread, mashed potatoes and spinach swimming in water (but the saving grace was a wonderful pudding of custard and cake). My sister still recalls her ecstatic discovery of Enid Blyton, and her even greater thrill when she saw *The River of Adventure* on the recently introduced black-and-white television. Another distinct memory is when her whole class was taken out to stand on the street to wave to the Queen. When she came home she exclaimed to my mother: 'Oh my God, I saw the Queen!'

Although my father had learnt so much about the English people, he felt like a stranger in their country. It would have been difficult for him to explain why if he'd been asked. He spoke good English, he was part of an elite service set up by the British, he dressed like them, and there was so much historically that was common ground. A group photo taken at the Defence College has him standing in the second row wearing a three-piece suit, surrounded by much taller, beaming white men. There is a smile on his face, but I can sense uneasiness in his stance, as though he is on probation; there's a demeanour of insecurity in the way he is withdrawn into himself. He was not made to feel unwelcome in any way, but cultures are ultimately opaque to the outsider, and there is a subterranean stress of not belonging, an effort to adjust that is mostly unable to bridge the gap of difference. My mother often told me how much she missed home during that one year in England. The constantly grey weather did something to her soul, she said. What one misses when in a different cultural milieu is both quantifiable and elusive. A sudden gesture, the tone of a voice, a musical note in the distance, a stray face in an unknown window, a ray of the sun, almost anything can suddenly, irrationally, recall memories of home. There was a calendar on the wall on which she struck out each day that passed.

My father wrote poetry, and the interesting thing is that although he had been a student of English literature all his life, he wanted to be published only in Hindi or in Urdu. I once asked him why not in English, and he said he could never really be sure of himself in English. The full import of what he meant eluded me as a child, but came back to haunt me in later life. His published collection of poems was called *Pulkaavali*. Its imagery was full of the monsoon clouds, the

yellow of mustard fields, the blooming of the harshringar, the ochre splash of an Indian sunset, the stillness of a summer dawn. His poems spoke of the love of Radha for Krishna, of the magic of the blue god's flute, and of death and yearning and separation and the joy of union, but always against a canvas where the Ganga was in the background and the Purvaiya, the east wind, blew gently over its waters. It was as though for the expression of his deepest creative instincts he withdrew to the world which he had consciously excluded from his overt self all his life.

And yet, such was his lot, that no one world could be complete in itself. Like so many of the colonized, he was condemned to live a life of perpetual dichotomy, of not being fully absorbed in what was effortlessly his own, while trying almost all his waking hours to cultivate what could never fully *become* his own. I once saw a report he had written as a young district officer. His British superior had made notations in the margin, correcting language and grammar. Whether his superior had meant it as an assertion of authority or was merely doing what any professional in his position would have instinctively done, we can be certain that Badrinath would have felt inferior. This sense of inferiority was an inherent part of the colonial structure, but it did not provoke rejection of the colonizer's language and ways or even cause significant resentment. It was as though an entire people and race had lost the ability to reawaken and make a fresh beginning. For a vast number of Indians, especially of the elite and middle classes, such dichotomy, often not even felt consciously, became the only reality. The man who in his private moments wrote so lyrically of the celestial love between Krishna and Radha now looks at me from a framed photograph, dressed in fashionable tweed coat and tie and brogues and a leather hat.

Pictures reveal far more than the moment they capture. There is one of my nana, my mother's father, dating back to the 1930s. It was taken when he was appointed a judge of the Allahabad High Court. He's posing for the photographer, formally seated on a Queen Anne chair, and looking, except for his brown skin, every inch an Englishman. It was not easy for me to identify the different elements of his extraordinary dress, but I could make out a well-cut long coat, a white ruffled shirt with the cuffs spilling out of the coat sleeves, black

stockings held up with garters, white gloves, a sword in scabbard at his waist, and on his feet, pumps with ornate circular buckles. My maternal grandfather's home was a sprawling bungalow in the colonial style. The rooms in the front were British in format, with a formal drawing room and dining room, a library with only English books, and a kitchen for 'angrezi khana', with a khansama in charge. At the back was an aangan, and abutting it a rasoighar in the hands of a maharaj, where only vegetarian food was made in the traditional style on an open wood fire.

The British had made Allahabad the capital of the North-Western Provinces in 1858. A new and separate Civil Lines was laid out then, north of the old city and physically severed from it by the Calcutta–Delhi railway line, also constructed at this time. The old city was left to fester in the primeval rhythms of the past, a warren of mohallas and narrow and crowded lanes, while the new had broad boulevards and bungalows in large compounds, civic amenities, a shopping area for Europeans and an imposing Gothic cathedral. It was the aspiration of upwardly mobile Indians to renounce their linkages with the old city and find a place in Civil Lines. My grandfather succeeded quite well, building his home on Elgin Road.

The name of the road was not changed for years after 1947. Till well into the 1960s my grandfather's address was Elgin Road, and my father's in New Delhi was Queen Mary's Avenue. There was no need to repudiate a past, or even interrogate it, when so much of it remained a part of the present. But as I look at the picture of my grandfather again, I wonder whether he felt the slightest sense of incongruence in garters and a long coat. Can clothes change a people, or can people wear another culture's signature costumes without anything being lost or compromised in the process? Even in the twenty-first century, it is a relevant question to ask. I have always found the most adept foreigner looking slightly awkward in a dhoti or pyjama-kurta or in a sari. There is nothing wrong in the fit or in the way the garment has been worn; just an indefinable sense that something is laboured, just that trace of self-consciousness that renders the interaction inauthentic, as if the clothes were never meant for that person to wear. I myself never saw my grandfather in anything but a dhoti and kurta, because after he retired—and that is when I met him—he wore nothing else. Was the man in the stockings and the ornate buckled shoes the same as the one in the dhoti-kurta, I would ask myself. Obviously, it was the same person, but what was the *cost* for him of inhabiting two worlds that were so vastly different? For the best part of his life he read the judgements of the Queen's Privy Council, conducted his court in English, was addressed as 'My Lord', built an excellent library of English books, sent his son to study in England, and wore western clothes. But in his old age he wore only a dhoti-kurta and only read the *Ramayana*.

The versatility of people should not be overrated. A people and a society are not like quick-change artists who can adopt and discard one persona for another in an endless, harmless game. There is a cost to this process, a toll that it takes, and consequences that linger on much longer than one thinks. I have vivid memories of my grandfather, sitting on his bed, legs folded under the folds of his dhoti, shoulders hunched over the open pages of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*, reading aloud in a sing-song voice. What was the suppressed gene that resurfaced in him after such a long period of neglect, taking him back to a tradition that pre-dated the British? And, if its hold was so strong as not to be extinguished, what was the cost to him of the adjustments he had made to suppress it in deference to British influence, allowing the long coat and garters to have greater primacy than his dhoti-kurta?

In recent times, vast parts of the world have seen the most remarkable process of co-option, where loss is actually perceived as gain by the victim, and the erosion of original identity and the assumption of another is very rarely perceived as caricature until much later, if at all. In some, a reverse process sets in, a desire to return to one's roots, to become what one was always meant to be. It is as if the play is over, and the long coat and garters can be put away, and people can go back to being their real selves. But if the sense of loss is mostly driven underground in the victim, the mimicry and the incongruity is noticed only by the foreigner, sometimes with smugness and approval, at others with derision and ridicule.

Lord Macaulay, who is undoubtedly the colonial era's single most

influential figure in initiating this process of co-option, was quite appalled when he saw Shakespeare being performed by native children in Calcutta. 'I can conceive nothing more grotesque than the scene from the *Merchant of Venice*, with Portia represented by a little black boy,' he wrote angrily. 'The society of Calcutta assemble to see what progress we are making; and we produce a sample of a boy who repeats some blackguard doggerel of George Colman's, about a fat gentleman who was put to bed over an oven . . . Our disciple tries to hiccup, and tumbles and staggers about in imitation of tipsy English sailors . . .'[3] The Shakespeare Society at the elite St Stephen's College in Delhi, where I studied too, came to my mind when I first read Macaulay's pained reaction. Upper-class Indian boys performing Shakespeare with eloquence and confidence, without any knowledge whatsoever of theatre in their own languages, against the backdrop of sets recalling medieval English castles, very much like 'little black boys' trying to be Portia. In London, I remember seeing a crossover production of *Twelfth Night*. The English actors spoke their lines naturally; the Indians were louder, more enthusiastic, but embarrassingly unclear.

The Indian who read the citation presented to my father must have had the same difficulty with the lines of Moore, although few in the audience would have noticed. However, to the foreign observer the caricature always come through vividly. In his short story 'The Head of the District', Rudyard Kipling ridicules Deputy Commissioner Girish Chunder De as 'the fat black eater of fish', who is 'more English than the English', his head filled with 'much curious book-knowledge of bump-suppers, cricket matches, hunting runs and other unholy sports of the alien'. I cannot fault Kipling's reaction. An imitation is by definition subject to evaluation; those who belong effortlessly to the original have the right to see the difference, to comment on the copy, to satirize the effort, to publicly encourage and privately ridicule the mimicry. Kipling, who spoke about the 'white man's burden', and was an unrepentant imperialist, would have been quite pleased that children in many Indian schools still learn his poems by heart, and that the house within the J.J. School of Art campus in Mumbai where he lived till the age of five is being converted into a museum.

Amin Jaffar, the young and brilliant curator who was till recently

with the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, spoke to me about the obsession of the Indian royalty with westernization. In the 1890s a British painter was to make the portrait of the Maharani of Vijayanagara. When he arrived he was surprised to see the lady dressed entirely in western attire. She had had the dress copied from an English magazine. The British artist, who felt that Indian textiles were superior, had to work very hard to persuade her to dress in traditional clothes. The Maharaja of Bikaner would insist on wearing the medals given to him by the British even on tunics made of Indian muslin. According to Amin, a study of old portraits shows that our erstwhile royals would almost invariably wear western footwear even under a fully traditional dress.

In independent, democratic India, the absurdities and anxieties of the co-opted have continued. I remember the morning when in grade three at the elite, 'English-medium' St Columba's School in New Delhi, I participated in my first elocution contest and recited, much like the little black boy who had irritated Macaulay more than two hundred years earlier, a passage from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. My mother who was in the audience, dressed in a sari with a red bindi on her forehead, told me later that she had been as nervous as I about the correct pronunciation of Mephistopheles! The way the tongue sits on a word is a sure sign of belonging. The English language is especially treacherous because it is not phonetic. After decades of speaking it, and having lived with it as my first language, I'm still unsure of the correct pronunciation of some words.

The great myth is that 'great' languages are infinitely malleable, that you can indigenize them with impunity, speak them with any inflection, break and make words in any way you want. Yes, languages do acquire local colour, but there are limits to their mutilation and to what they can accommodate without loss of meaning and significance. And change is best introduced—and absorbed and sustained—by those to whom that language belongs. For all the easy declarations many of us make about English being an Indian language, the fact is that it is not. We use it, it serves a purpose, it is of great benefit in the globalized world and should be available to everyone, not just the elite. But it is false and damaging to forget how it was brought to and imposed on India. Many of us have mastered it now, and 'read, speak

and dream' in it, but which one of us did this as a conscious choice? By mixing Hindi, Tamil, Bengali or Marathi words and phrases with English, we don't make that language our own. The emotional and cultural life of an entire subcontinent—the romance of our songs and poetry, the complex web of the extended family, the particular realities of our geography and climate—is alien to a language that has been with us barely three centuries. For much of what is central to our psyche, English has no words.

The same would be true of an Indian language in Europe. I went once to the prestigious St James's School in fashionable Kensington in London to hear English children from grade one to six recite Sanskrit. The school had acquired a full-time Sanskrit teacher, a pleasant Englishman who had learnt the language at Oxford. The children did a most creditable job, reciting with confidence well-known shlokas from the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita and the *Bhagwata Purana*. The hall was full of proud and excited parents, and each group got a standing ovation. I sat wondering about the osmosis of culture. Here, in a school in London, were English children reciting lines written thousands of years ago by Indian sages on the banks of the Ganga, to an audience more familiar with the latest Harry Potter film than the intricacies of Hindu metaphysics.

It must have been equally surreal to hear Indian children reciting Shakespeare to a Bengali-speaking audience in a muggy school on the banks of the Hooghly 300 years ago. The difference, of course, was that they did so in subjugation, while these young British children in blue uniforms and polished shoes were doing it out of choice. For one group it was a novelty, an act of openness, the partaking of another's culture out of free choice; for the other it was an act of compulsion, the absence of choice, the subversion of their cultural continuity. But whether then or now, and quite apart from the essential difference in the two situations, the very process of cultural exchange has its limitations. I could not but notice how 'foreign' the accent of the English children was. For once I, an Indian, was in a position to judge, to evaluate, to see how the 'copy' compared with the original. Many of the words were so accented that I had to make an effort to understand them. I could sense the struggle of the children to make their Anglo-Saxon tongues grip the words, and it struck me again how

inflexible languages are, and how only those who have no option but to learn someone else's language begin to believe that it can become theirs.

My mother was the repository of traditional culture in our home: of our rituals, folklore, songs and language. As a child she was escorted to the Girls' High School in Allahabad where the medium of education was English; but she studied Indian classical music in college, knew the *Ramayana* by heart, spoke Bhojpuri, and had learnt from her mother the songs of the soil, the rituals of worship and the social customs of a Hindu home. On Ram Navami and Janamashtami she got up at the crack of dawn to prepare for the puja, cleaning the ceremonial vessels, making the prasad, rearranging the puja room. The lullabies she sang to me were from the folk tales she had grown up with, and she set to music the poems my father wrote, giving each a different raga. When my father had a heart attack, she did an akhand path—a continuous, unbroken recitation—of the Ramayana. But, it was also she who decided to move me from Modern School to St Columba's. The level of Hindi at Modern School, I distinctly recall her argument, was too high, and it was more important that I learnt English.

People don't make cultural choices in a vacuum. There is a context, a background, a set of circumstances that influence the options before us and what we pick from them. Each choice then unleashes a consequence, inexorable, concrete and long lasting. My generation grew up on the stories of the freedom movement, the sacrifices of the freedom fighters, the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru. But the first books I read were Enid Blyton's Noddy books. I borrowed my first Enid Blyton from the library of the exclusive Gymkhana Club of which my father was a member. The library had no books in Hindi or any of the other Indian languages, and the position is much the same today. Not far from where we lived, and next to Connaught Circus, was the down-heel tenement of Shankar Market, where one bookstore—Ram Gopal Sharma & Sons—loaned out Blyton books. Often, after my father returned from office, we children would persuade him to drive up to Shankar Market so we could borrow books, and my joy knew no bounds if the Enid Blyton I wanted was there. I've seen the same delight in children today when they manage to buy the first available copies of the new Harry Potter novel for close to Rs 1000. (It goes

without saying that no children's book by an Indian author, in any language, sells as much or gets as much media space.)

If an entire generation of the educated elite in a country reads books mostly in a foreign language, and learns about the milieu of that language in direct proportion to its ignorance about its own heritage, is this a tribute to the plurality and cosmopolitanism of our times? Or is there something more serious afoot here? If we are aware of what is being gained, we must also take into account what is being lost. Certainly, the hard-won political independence of the country may not be at stake, but freedom is not only about having one's own flag and Constitution and Parliament; freedom is as much about re-appropriating your cultural space, of reclaiming your identity, of belonging authentically to where you come from, because without these your articulation of freedom has a synthetic and imitative quality. The great philosopher Osho once made the distinction between organic unity and mechanical unity:

> Have you observed the difference between an organic unity and a mechanical unity? You make a car engine; you can purchase parts from the market and you can fix those parts, and the engine starts functioning like a unity. Or you can purchase parts of a radio from the market and you can fix them, and the radio starts functioning like a unity. Somehow it comes to have a self. No part in itself can function as a radio; all parts together start functioning like a radio, but still the unity is mechanical, forced from the outside. Then you throw seeds into the ground, and those seeds die into the soil and a plant arises. This unity is organic; it is not forced from outside, it was in the seed itself. The seed goes on spreading, goes on gathering a thousand and one things from the earth, from the air, from the sun, from the sky, but the unity is coming from within. The centre comes first, and then the circumference. In a mechanical unity the circumference comes first and then the centre.[4]

Colonial rule robbed the educated elite of India of its organic unity. For three hundred years an entire nation and its people became the object of an external curiosity, brown fish swimming around in a bowl held in white hands. A new circumference came into being, but its coordinates were fixed by the rulers, while the organic unity of the seed lay dormant in the soil. The irony is that those who were the victims of this process fell in love with the circumference, and all its borrowed plumes and transplanted paraphernalia, and developed a sense of heenta, of inferiority about their own culture. If you ask educated Indians a question in Hindi or their mother tongue, more often than not they will reply in English, lest you think that they don't know the language. The impact of this sense of inferiority, of denial and devaluation of what is one's own in preference for what was imposed, continues to be felt in every sphere of creative expression: art, architecture, academics, music, sports, literature and language. Reservoirs of organic refinement exist, but there is a predisposition, on a national scale, to borrow and to mimic, to judge one's own self-esteem by the touchstones of another's culture. The colonial empires of the past succeeded not merely in the physical subjugation of the ruled; their real success lay in the colonization of the mind and, in this respect, the British were perhaps the most successful.

In 1985, when I was in my early thirties, I wrote a biography of the great nineteenth-century Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib. In the Preface to the book I explained what prompted me to write the book:

> Some years ago, I went to a well-known bookshop in Delhi and asked for a book on Ghalib. I was told they had none. A search in some other bookshops yielded a few extended booklets, mostly translations into English of some verses of his Urdu Diwan. I found this situation very strange. It was like going to a bookshop in London and being told that they had no books on Yeats or Eliot, given that in Northern India, especially, Ghalib is a household name; his Urdu verses tend to crop up in everyday conversation . . . But the example of the bookshop that did not stock Ghalib is only one indication of the cultural malaise that stalks our times. I find it interesting that Ghalib, or for that matter so much else of what constitutes our cultural heritage, has survived today *in spite* of the post-1947 generation. Most people of my age in India—and I am no exception—have grown up as cultural orphans: they have learnt neither Sanskrit nor Urdu and so remain (sometimes sheepishly) incurious about a cultural heritage that may soon dry

up due to the indifference of their response. This book, therefore, is not just an act of homage to a great man. It is, at a deeply personal level, an act of penance and a pilgrimage, an effort to overcome in my own life the sense of inadequacy many of my age have felt growing up in such culturally nondescript times.

I did my penance, but I had no option but to do it in English, since by now it had become my first language. Of course, writing in English then, as now, is a passport to success. Penguin India, which had just opened shop in Delhi, published the book. It was widely and favourably reviewed and attracted nationwide notice, because the English media was what the elite read. My boss then, a senior and respected member of the diplomatic service, who represented India with distinction in more than one country, wanted to review it. He was the same person who often whispered to me on the intercom: 'I say, old chap, there are some UMTs and HMTs sitting with me. Do you think you can take care of them?' UMT stood for Urdu Medium Type and HMT for Hindi Medium Type. He was perhaps an extreme example of what had *not* changed in post-colonial India, but his approach to the HMTs and the UMTs was quite representative of the attitudes of the anglicized middle and upper classes.

Sometimes I feel that it might have been good for us if we had had a watered-down version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. We gained political independence, but it led to little or no introspection about the need for cultural emancipation. The same British-created English-speaking elite inherited the levers of freedom, and, much worse, became the role models for those lower down the ladder. The amazing thing is that the *absence* of change went mostly unnoticed. When Dr Rajendra Prasad was elected as the chairman of the Constituent Assembly in 1946, the first seven speakers who wrote to felicitate him spoke—in unintended tribute to that prophetic strategist, Macaulay—in English. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who, coming from the remote North West Frontier region, was probably less exposed to mainstream British colonialism, was the first to speak in Hindustani. Prior to 1947, Nehru had expostulated against the colonial bureaucratic apparatus, saying emphatically that 'the ICS and similar services should cease to exist'. But the ICS continued with little or no change after 1947. In Kolkata, the Bengal Club where Macaulay once lived opened its doors to Indians only in 1959, more than a decade after Independence, and an Indian did not replace a Britisher as the president of the club until another seven years after that! In Mumbai, another leading club kept this notice outside its premises for many years after Independence: DOGS AND INDIANS NOT ALLOWED.

For decades after 1947, the statue of King George V continued to look down imperiously from the canopy at India Gate in New Delhi. When it was finally removed, the newly independent nation, with a civilizational heritage at least 3000 years old, could not find any other to replace it. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, or Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first prime minister and the maker of modern India, would have been obvious choices, or a symbol such as the Ashoka pillar from Sarnath,[5] but the canopy is still forlornly empty, as though an entire nation has run out of ideas after the departure of the British King's likeness. Not far from India Gate is the Secretariat built by Lutyens and Baker. It is even today the headquarters of our administration. Here, a visitor to North Block can still read these humiliating lines inscribed by the colonial rulers:

LIBERTY WILL NOT DESCEND TO A
PEOPLE, A PEOPLE MUST RAISE THEMSELVES TO
LIBERTY. IT IS A BLESSING WHICH MUST BE
EARNED BEFORE IT CAN BE ENJOYED.

Niall Ferguson, the historian who wrote *Empire*, a nostalgic paean to British colonization, says that these lines 'must be the most condescending in the entire history of the Empire'.[6] No matter, they are still there, and no one feels the worse for it.

Dismantling the past cannot be a mechanical process. The need to do so must stem from a grass-roots desire not to blindly reject but to reconstruct from the debris of the past an edifice that conforms to our ethos and heritage. If the need is not felt, then it is as much a tribute to those who ruled us as it is a sign of our failure to understand just how much of our lives we've lost to caricature. In the year 2007, sixty years after the British left, I sat in on an internal meeting in the conference room of the Foreign Office in South Block. All the officers—the men in suit and tie, the women in sari or salwar-kameez—spoke

only in English, their notes were in English. Words were mispronounced and the sentences were often clumsy, but they were unable to express themselves fluently in any other language, either. Bright men and women trapped in the shadows of the past, unable to see the sheer incongruity of the situation. If this was not the Chancellery of a country that had pretensions to being a superpower, the incongruity would not have jarred. Earlier that day I had taken the Japanese ambassador out for lunch. He could communicate with us in English but his briefing notes were in Japanese. In Japan, among his own, he would speak Japanese. The Russians, the Chinese, the French or the Koreans would similarly speak and write their own language, acknowledging the utility of English only for purposes of external communication. Percival Spear once insightfully wrote that India broke 'her British fetters with western hammers'. Over sixty years after 1947, the fetters remain, in so many unnoticed, unexamined ways, constricting our choices about how we dress, how we speak, what we emulate, and who we wish to become, and the tragedy is that we have not yet devised our own hammers to break them.

On my way to work in New Delhi, the capital of modern India, I see every morning several white Ambassador cars (the vehicle of high office) with this written on the back: GOVT OF INDIA. POWER BREAK. KEEP DISTENCE, a proclamation of the nation of linguistic half-castes we have become. The worrying thing is that such howlers are ubiquitous, but nobody thinks too much is at stake. In the elite residential area of Vasant Vihar where most diplomats in Delhi stay, one of the main boulevards is called Basant, after the Hindi word for spring, but the signage in English reads BASNAT, which means nothing at all. A signboard outside an important government office in the capital city reads: INSURANCE REGULARETY ATHORITY OF INDIA. Not far away, another board warns motorists of a SPEED BRECKER ahead. In a democracy where an overwhelming majority do not read or understand English, it occurs to no one that it is profoundly undemocratic and dangerous to have warnings on highways in English. Or to have information about AIDS prevention, traffic rules, emergency services, the risk of cancer from cigarette smoking, the composition of life-saving drugs—all in English. Like the poor, those without English deserve the tragedies and misfortunes that visit them.

Why has a civilization where the written word goes back to the dawn of time allowed itself to come to such a pass? The spelling mistakes are of far less consequence than the tolerance with which they are viewed, as though we are meant to be like this, and will muddle through forever in this culturally substandard manner. Not long ago I was invited by an organization called the Federation of Indian Publishers to address them. The meeting was at the Chelmsford Club, a rundown creation of British times whose only asset is that it is in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi. I almost said no, because it offended me to go to a club named after a man who was the viceroy of India when the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh took place. There is a huge cultural amnesia that the colonial project spawns in its victims; it is an amnesia that sanitizes symbols of oppression and humiliation of their true meaning; it creates an indifference based not on objective assessment, or any notion of forgiveness, or a desire to transcend the past, but on sheer ignorance. The once colonized, even years after political liberation, lose the ability to interrogate the past with any sense of self-respect or pride. Why else would 'respectable' citizens of free India continue to take pride in being members of a club named after a person who condoned and defended the worst act of political murder during the freedom struggle? What was even more pathetic was that the group gathered at the club that afternoon called themselves publishers of English-language books, but could hardly speak the language or write it. The president of the federation read out a welcome statement full of grammatical errors and pronunciation howlers, and the entire proceedings were conducted in appallingly bad English. The essential point is that it is unbecoming for great cultures and civilizations to reduce themselves to caricature. My grandfather, in a long coat and top hat was a caricature, as were the publishers in Chelmsford Club speaking bad English.

But what if people like my grandfather and the publishers I met at Chelmsford Club had trained themselves to speak English better than the English themselves; if they had superior knowledge of English literature and history; if they could put to shame, with their wit and sophistication, any well-bred Anglo-Saxon? Would they have appeared less incongruous and absurd?

On a visit to Oxford in 2004, my wife Renuka and I were invited to

dinner by the venerable Tapan Raychaudhuri, Professor Emeritus at St Anthony's College. It turned out to be quite an entertaining evening, the only other guests being the novelist Kunal Basu and his wife. The good professor was in an expansive mood, having greatly enjoyed the excellent Indian meal made by his wife, and I could not but resist the feeling that he had been so prompt with his dinner invitation only because it would be an opportunity for him and his wife to make some good Indian food, a break from the microwave fare of every day. Following dinner, I mentioned the name of the writer Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who, until his death a few years ago, had lived in Oxford, almost around the corner from the Raychaudhuri's. This unleashed a great many anecdotes from our host, some of which were quite priceless.

Nirad Chaudhuri had spent a lifetime—and very considerable scholarship—in denigrating his own people and venerating the British. But from what Professor Raychaudhuri told us, he was never really accepted by the latter. He took great pride in speaking the Queen's English and dressed like the most fastidious English gentleman, but remained for Englishmen an oddity, a diminutive curiosity, a relic of the past, respected for his scholarship but tolerated only for his partisanship in their favour. Tapan recalled Nirad Babu's laughable efforts at preserving his 'English' image, especially when an Englishman was coming to see him. He would keep his one and only Doulton tea set ready, and dress for the occasion in an overdone manner, which would quite startle his unsuspecting guest. He would go out of his way to tell his British visitor that he never ate the food the 'natives' ate, although on one occasion, Tapan remembered, he had just eaten a meal of rice and machher jhol with great relish. The gardener at St Anthony's College once ran into Nirad's son, and jocularly remarked that he would come home sometime to have some curry. The son, well trained by his father, reacted with horror. 'We do not eat curry in our home,' he retorted. 'My father always has an English breakfast with bacon and eggs.'

Nirad's knowledge of British history and heritage was a kind of defence mechanism to prove his Englishness. If he was serving a wine, he would begin to give its history and a comparative analysis of similar wines and their vintage, leaving his visitors not so much impressed as flummoxed. Apparently, the monthly stipend he was

paid by Oxford University—where he had chosen to spend his last years in self-imposed exile—was quite small, and there was considerable uncertainty on how long it would continue. He was unsure too how long he would be able to retain the house allotted to him. These insecurities only accentuated his desire to prove his loyalty to his benefactors, and while he was at his imperious best in overwhelming the fawning Indian acolytes that called on him, he was reduced to a somewhat pathetic supplicant before his white friends. Sometimes his efforts to impress them and to be counted among them would lead to unexpected consequences. A member of the House of Lords, who met Nirad at a time when he was in dire need of pecuniary help, was quite taken aback by the expensive wines and spirits served at the octogenarian's home. The truth was that although in financial distress, Nirad Chaudhuri would spend exorbitantly on such things to impress his English friends. None of his books sold more than 5000 copies, not even in England, a rather despondent showing for a man who became the biggest apologist of British rule and civilization.

Nirad Chaudhuri's was a caricatured reaction. He saw the appalling mimicry and mediocrity that characterized the lifestyle and mannerisms of the Indian brown sahibs, especially since he was not born to that background. He decided, therefore, to become the true brown Englishman, and use this to expose the shallowness and superficiality of those who claimed to be British in their upbringing and exposure. He famously dedicated his first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, to the British Empire, and spent an entire lifetime educating himself on the intricacies of British culture, reading the classics of English literature, learning Latin, understanding the difference between port and sherry, and all the trivia that could establish him as the true Indian inheritor of British civilization and culture. There is little doubt that he succeeded, and became a pucca brown sahib, far more knowledgeable than his peers who superficially aspired to the same status. But in the process he became a caricature himself. He did not use his vast intellectual resources to chisel an authentic identity for himself. Instead, he chose to become the most flamboyantly learned mimic of an alien civilization, and allowed his life and writings to be conditioned more by a desire to put a certain class of his own countrymen in their place than to introspect, from the point of his

heritage and milieu, on where he really belonged himself. To reject your cultural inheritance out of genuine conviction, after having argued and fought with it and shown up its flaws and hypocrisies, is one thing, and to blindly follow an alien culture out of a sense of inferiority is quite another. The former is an act of courage that may lead to necessary reform and correction; the latter mere caricature that will diminish both the individual and an entire society.

My mother spent the last two years of her life with me in Cyprus, where I was posted as India's high commissioner. Cyprus too has been a British colony, but it was interesting—and my mother noticed it first—that while the Cypriots spoke to us in English, their natural language of communication among themselves was Greek. The island's major papers were in Greek, and the few English papers were brought out for limited circulation, mostly by expatriates. My mother spent a great deal of her time in Cyprus translating into English the folk songs relating to marriage from the region around Allahabad, where she was born. Her worry was that this intangible heritage would be lost forever to her grandchildren. They knew almost nothing about it, and she was afraid that after her this treasure of meaning and ritual, so redolent of the soil, would never be sung or practised again. In the Introduction to her book, which she completed a few weeks before she passed away, she wrote:

> Whenever my son and his wife were home in the evenings in Cyprus, the family would sit together till dinnertime. My son termed the time thus spent together as the 'happy hour'. On one such evening, hearing me hum a tune to myself he asked me what I was singing. I told him that it was a folk song—a sohar, which is normally sung at the time of the birth of a baby in the family. He asked me to sing it aloud, which I did. When the song was over I asked him if he understood what the song said. He replied, not entirely. It was then that I realized how my children had been removed from their roots, and how much they had been deprived of the wealth of emotions, laughter, the meaning of relationships and simply the earthly wisdom contained in these songs. To some extent I blamed myself for not having kept them in touch with the old traditions, the culture of which one could be rightly proud of, and the values and 'sanskars' which enrich one's life . . . The modern generation has a hundred new priorities, and remembrance of things past is not one of them. But I believe it is important for people to know their cultural roots and the rich tapestry of the traditions to which they are heir, in order for them to step authentically into the future.

When my mother died, her loved ones—her children and their spouses and her grandchildren—were around her. The doctors had told us that there was nothing they could do to save her and that the time had come to let her go. In her last moments, those who belonged to her chanted in unison the Gayatri mantra: *'Om bhur bhuva svaha, tat savitur virenyam, bhargo devasya dhimahi, dhiyo yo nam prachodiyata.'* We sang too a bhajan from Tulsidas's Ramayana which she was very fond of: *'Shri Ramchandra kripalu bhajmana harana bhav bhaya darunam.'* At the cremation ground, as her body was set to flame, I kept thinking of the second line of that bhajan: *'Nav kanj lochan kanj mukh kar kanj pad kanjarunam,'* and I still recall vividly that the stray, even irrational, thought came to me, as I fed ladles of ghee to the pyre, that no Indian could ever compose in English—however great his or her mastery of that language may be—such an effortlessly sublime line of linguistic fluency, simplicity and beauty.

2

THE IMPERISHABLE EMPIRE

On a beautiful spring morning at the end of March 2005, Renuka and I set out to pay obeisance at the grave of Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay at Westminster Abbey: he had, after all, played a pivotal role in shaping British India, and continues to exercise enormous influence over the Indian Republic even today. Stepping into the cavernous church from the bright light outside, we took some time to take in the soaring vaulted ceilings, the profusion of arches, the richness of the stained-glass panels and the ornate decorations. A life-size statue of Charles John Earl Canning, KG, Governor General and First Viceroy of India (1856–62), greeted us very near the entrance. According to his tombstone, he had shown 'great fortitude and wise clemency' during the 'perilous crisis of the sepoy mutiny', thereby winning the lasting gratitude of his countrymen. It was strange reading these lines, uncontested and unqualified, in twenty-first-century Britain. The Abbey is littered with similar graves, some very beautifully decorated, with life-size statues in final repose, hands joined in prayer, of military men who had distinguished themselves in helping to win and sustain the British empire.

We pressed on, past the tomb of Henry VII and his personal chapel, and the tombs of Edward III and Richard II, stopping briefly to admire the Coronation Chair, until we reached the Poet's Corner, where

Macaulay is buried. An entire galaxy of the great names of the English language—Dryden, Longfellow, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, George Eliot, Robert Browning, Lord Byron, Dylan Thomas, Lewis Carroll—are buried around him. Macaulay's grave was a simple black slab of granite, on which was etched in gold lettering: THOMAS BABINGTON, LORD MACAULAY, BORN AT ROTHLEY TEMPLE, LEICESTERSHIRE, OCTOBER 25, 1800, DIED AT HOLLEY LODGE, CAMPDEN HILL, DECEMBER 28, 1859. In terms of tribute there were just two lines: HIS BODY IS BURIED IN PEACE, BUT HIS NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE. We stood there in silence. I could not bring myself to walk over the grave, as so many others—mostly tourists—were doing. Across, near the graves of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling, stood a statue of Shakespeare. The face of the bard, framed in a ray of light refracted from the massive stained-glass panel above, seemed to look down approvingly at the last resting place of a man who had done so much for the propagation of the English language.

Lord Macaulay sailed for India in February 1834 on a ship called *The Asia*. During the journey he remained largely aloof from the other passengers, and was thankful for being left alone. Not gregarious by temperament, he was proud of his intellectual credentials and scholarly achievements, and did not suffer fools gladly. Before he was eight, he had written a remarkably well-argued essay on the desirability of converting heathens to Christianity. This was not surprising given that his father, Zachary Macaulay, was the editor of the evangelical magazine *The Christian Observer*, and wanted his son to serve the Church. Young Macaulay went on to join Cambridge, and a brilliant academic career there was followed by a half-hearted stint as a lawyer, until in 1830 he achieved his real ambition, which was entry to the House of Commons. In Parliament, his speeches on the Reform Bill and his great skills as an orator soon earned him the reputation of being the Burke of his times. In 1832 he was appointed one of the commissioners of the Board of Control for India, and, as a result of his hard work, became its secretary soon after. At the end of 1833 he was nominated to be a member of the Supreme Council to govern India, an offer he accepted immediately, not only because it carried a princely salary of £10,000 a year, but also because it would help him fulfil his cherished desire to give to the subject Indian people European knowledge, so that 'they

may in some future age, demand European institutions'. If this were to happen, it would be an enduring victory even if the sceptre were to pass away from the British empire. For, as he said in a famous—and prophetic—speech in the House of Commons, 'There are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.'[1]

Now, as *The Asia* sailed towards distant India, towards a people he believed were 'sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition', Macaulay settled down purposefully to rediscover the glories of his own culture and heritage, and to recharge his civilizational batteries before he dealt with the natives. He read insatiably, re-examining the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, devouring again Virgil, Dante and Petrarch, admiring once more the prose of Gibbon's Rome, and rereading—unbelievably enough—all the seventy volumes of Voltaire.

From this overdose of classical Graeco-Roman culture, his first encounter with India, when *The Asia* docked at Madras on 10 June 1834, was with a native who came aboard in what seemed to him nothing but a pointed yellow cap. Macaulay was rather struck by the *colour* and nakedness of this specimen, and, according to his own confession, almost died laughing. Still breathing the literary infusions of Virgil and Voltaire, he found everything strange in the sea of dark faces with white turbans. As he set foot on the beach, a salute of fifteen guns greeted the new member of the Supreme Council. A week later he left Madras for Ooty, to spend some time with Governor General Lord William Bentinck, who was convalescing there. He travelled the 400 miles on the shoulders of Indian men, but the scenery did not impress him, and wherever he broke journey, he observed how rulers who once ruled over territories as large as a European kingdom now fawned over him. The Maharaja of Mysore, one of the wealthiest potentates of India, insisted on showing him his entire wardrobe, and admitted proudly that his most prized possession was a head of the Duke of Wellington, which Macaulay dismissed as being probably taken from a signpost in England.

In the cool heights of Ooty, he noticed, while sitting on a carpeted floor beside a blazing wood fire, how his 'black' servants were coughing all around him. On the eve of his departure, a squabble among his servants greatly upset him. Much against his wishes, he had to intervene to restore order, and noted in disgust that the natives are 'in truth, a race so accustomed to be trampled on by the strong that they always consider humanity as a sign of weakness'.[2] Twelve bearers—six at a time—carried his palanquin down to Madras, as he reclined and read Theodore Hook's *Love and Pride*. Ten porters and two police officers with swords and badges ran alongside, as the rain came down in torrents. From Madras he sailed for Calcutta, and amused himself during the voyage by learning Portuguese and reading the *The Luciad* twice. In Calcutta, he moved into a comfortable bungalow in Chowringhee (which is now the Bengal Club) with an army of servants.

The future linguistic destiny of India fell into his lap almost immediately after arriving in Calcutta. The Committee of Public Instruction set up by the British had been deadlocked for some time now because it was divided five against five. One set of five members wanted education in India to be essentially based on the heritage of its classical languages, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic; the other wanted elementary education to be in the 'vernacular' languages, with English coming in at the higher levels. The Supreme Council made Macaulay the president of the committee in January 1835 to break the impasse, and he took little time to do so. On 2 February he recorded his infamous minute, and in one rhetorical flourish rubbished the entire civilizational heritage of all Indians.

In these amnesiac, post-colonial times it is important to recall the mindset of the man. Macaulay argued the case of English because he believed fervently without the slightest iota of doubt that it was the product of a *superior* civilization and culture. Whoever knows English, he wrote, 'has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world put together.' Equally, and this was directly related to his notion of superiority, he was convinced that the culture of the natives was not only deficient, it was beyond redemption. How could they teach, at public expense, he asked, 'medical doctrines which would disgrace an

English farrier—astronomy, which would move laughter in the girls at an English boarding school—history, abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long—and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter'? Aware that his critics may point to the centuries of refinement and literary achievement each Indian language had behind it, he was blunt in his rebuttal: 'Does it matter in what grammar a man talks nonsense, with what purity of diction he tells us that the world is surrounded by a sea of butter, in what neat phrases he maintains that Mount Meru is the centre of the world?' He conceded that there could be some truth in Oriental sciences, but added dismissively: 'So there is in the Systems held by the rudest and most barbarous tribes of Caffrania and New Holland.'

Macaulay was convinced that the sacred books of the 'Hindoos' were full of knowledge only of 'the uses of Cusa grass, and all the mysteries of absorption in the Deity'. When the 'Hindoos' studied their texts, all that they learnt was how 'to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat'. There was no point thus in indulging the languages of the natives, whether classical or vernacular. English must be given primacy and propagated institutionally and immediately, and in doing so the long-term aim was crystal clear: 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern: a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.' This class would in time become 'by degrees fit vehicles for conveying [our] knowledge to the great mass of the population'.[3]

Having stated his views without the slightest trace of ambivalence, Macaulay dramatically resigned, just in case his decision was not accepted, for he wanted to be no part of a system that gave encouragement to 'absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, and absurd theology'. He need not have worried. On 7 March 1835 Lord Bentinck, with whom he had spent some time in Ooty en route to Calcutta, gave his fullest approval to the ideas contained in the minute. All public funds would henceforth be used only for the teaching of English; no new students seeking to enter Oriental institutions would be provided stipends; professorships in such institutions would not be filled; no government money would be

disbursed for printing anything in the native languages; and five schools for the teaching of English would be immediately opened in the major towns of Bengal.

The interesting thing about British colonialism was that while its goal was unalterably focussed, its practice was remarkably nuanced, conveying the impression that every decision had a deliberative side which allowed for debate, discussion and even dissent. Macaulay had his opponents among the British. The Orientalist lobby, opposed to his contemptuous dismissal of everything Indian and his arrogant espousal of English, was both vocal and powerful in the early years of British conquest. In 1781 William Hastings had founded the Calcutta Madrasa or Arabic College to enable Muslims to learn the principles and practices of Islamic law. A decade later, Jonathan Duncan, a scholar-administrator, set up the Sanskrit College at Benares for the preservation and learning of the laws, literature and religion of the Hindus. In 1800 Lord Wellesley established the Fort William College in Calcutta. Here the servants of the East India Company were required to learn Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit and six Indian vernacular languages. Interestingly, while they learnt English law and European history, they also had to study Hindu and Muslim law and Indian history. In fact, Fort William College was financed in part by small deductions from the salaries of all Company servants in India. In 1824 Lord Amherst inaugurated the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, and a year later the Delhi College came up in Shahjahanabad where, though English made its debut, the medium of instruction remained either Arabic, Persian or Sanskrit.

The Company's goal was to rule India, and this would not be possible unless its employees learnt a little more about who they were going to rule. But in addition to this utilitarian logic, there was, in the initial phase, a genuine respect for, and curiosity about, the culture of the natives. Sir William Jones (1746–94), who arrived in Calcutta in September 1783 to take up his assignment as a judge of the Supreme Court, was the most important figure of this scholarly interaction. Born in Westminster, he went to Harrow and Oxford, and was a linguistic genius who had learnt Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian and a smattering of Chinese by the age of twenty-two. Unlike Macaulay, who purposefully reread Gibbon, Dante and Voltaire on his voyage to India, Jones used his time journeying to Calcutta on board the frigate

Crocodile to write a memorandum on what needed to be studied about Indian culture and civilization. His list included Hindu and Muslim law, ancient scriptures, the modern politics and geography of Hindustan, and its medicine, chemistry, surgery, anatomy, poetry, rhetoric and music. Within four months of his arrival, on 15 January 1784, he had founded the Asiatic Society, which survives to this day and was in its time the most vibrant institution on Indian heritage and antiquity.

In the Grand Jury Room of the Calcutta Supreme Court, thirty gentlemen of British and European descent met for the first meeting of the Society. They included Justice John Hyde, John Carnac, Henry Vansittart, John Shore, Charles Wilkins, Francis Gladwin, Jonathan Duncan and others. William Jones spoke to them about how Asia was the 'nurse of sciences' and the 'inventress of delightful and useful art'. Governor General Warren Hastings was elected the first president of the Society and Jones the vice-president. For the next several decades, the members of the Society did pioneering work in studying various aspects of Indian culture and translating its important treatises. William Jones learnt Sanskrit himself and translated Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and the *Manusamhita* into English, and edited Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara*. He was also the first westerner to analyse and write a paper on Indian classical music. It was his intention to bring out a compendium of Hindu and Muslim law, and although he could not complete it, his *Institute of Hindu Law* was published in 1794 and his *Muhammedan Law of Inheritance* in 1792. In 1786, at the third meeting of the Asiatic Society, he made his famous observation that Sanskrit had perhaps common roots with Greek and Latin. 'The Sansckrit language,' he said, 'whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philosopher could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.'[4]

Jones's attempt to link Sanskrit to Greek and Latin was undoubtedly motivated by a desire to somehow assimilate a language he so greatly admired within a European framework, for he was never in doubt about the primacy of Western culture. It must be remembered that he and his band of enthusiastic Indophiles were not questioning the superiority of British civilization, or the right of the British to 'civilize' the natives; they were only more open to the notion that the people they were ordained to govern had a cultural legacy which could not be dismissed, and, indeed, in many areas, was worthy of respect. Their aim was to 'rediscover' India's glorious heritage for the Indians themselves, and their output towards this end was nothing short of astonishing. Sir Charles Wilkins (1750–1833) translated the Bhagavadgita into English in 1785, and also published a translation of the *Hitopadesha*. H.T. Colebrooke, who was the president of the Society from 1806 to 1815, published a critical edition of the Sanskrit lexicon *Amarakosha*. H.H. Wilson, secretary of the Society during roughly the same period, translated the Puranas into English and published an edition of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. He also brought out the three-volume *Theatre of the Hindus*, which was translated into German and French. Sir John Shore, who succeeded Jones as president of the Society in 1794, published an abridged English version of the *Yoga Vasistha*. The Society was given permanent premises when in 1805 the government gifted it land at the corner of Park Street and Chowringhee, where it is housed even today. It built up an excellent library and also started a public museum in 1814.

This curiosity, even respect, for Indian culture was not confined to Calcutta. When in 1805 the Mission of William Carey in nearby Serampore asked for monetary assistance to translate the Sanskrit *Ramayana*, it was given Rs 5,500. A branch of the Asiatic Society was opened in Bombay in 1803. A clutch of Orientalists were active in Madras too. Reading Persian classics was a favourite pastime for Charles Metcalfe, the British Resident in Delhi. William Fraser, who succeeded him, knew Urdu and Persian like a native and had an excellent library of Persian and Arabic books. Many among the British composed Persian and Urdu couplets; some even adopted a takhallus or pen-name of their own: Joseph Bensley 'Fana', George Puech 'Shor', and Alexander Heatherley 'Azad'.

The difference of opinion between the Anglicists and the Orientalists was, therefore, real and prolonged. H.H. Wilson wrote to a Bengali

friend in 1835 that 'it is a visionary absurdity to think of making English the language of India'.[5] He had his supporters in London as well. Charles William Wynn, president of the Board of Control of the East India Company from 1822 to 1828, was quite appalled at the attempt to force Indians to adopt English. John Cam Hobhouse, who assumed the presidency later, wrote to Lord Auckland in the spring of 1836 that 'there is a strong party here who think that the rights of conquest do not extend to the destruction of language, and who believe it would be extremely impolitic to withhold all support from the propagation of Oriental learning'.[6] James Prinsep, who was the secretary of the Asiatic Society in 1833, and who would in 1837 make the landmark breakthrough of deciphering the Brahmi script, enabling the Ashokan edicts to be read for the first time, protested the 'ultra radical subversion of all that now exists'.

Also perfect foils to Macaulay were Britishers like Sir Alexander Johnston. Born in India in 1775, Johnston learnt Tamil, Telugu and Hindustani, and as president of the Council in Ceylon (1811) helped found a branch of the Asiatic Society there. Later he became a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. In one of his reports from Ceylon he made the point that the Indians 'had made the same progress in logic and metaphysics by 1500 BC as the Greeks, possessed, centuries before the Greeks, laws equal to, and in some areas superior to theirs, possessed early knowledge of the numeral system which had proved to be essential for the achievements of Kepler, Newton, La Place and Napier, and devised astronomical tables of great scientific worth around 3000 BC.'[7] Even after Macaulay's infamous minute became policy, there were those who disagreed. In 1853, H.H. Wilson tried to analyse why Macaulay went wrong. 'I have great respect for Mr Macaulay's talents,' he told the House of Lords Select Committee, 'but he was new in India, and knew nothing of the people; he spoke only from what he saw immediately around him, which has been the great source of the mistakes committed by the advocates of English exclusively. They have known nothing of the country: they have not known what the people want; they only know the people of the large towns, where English is of use and is effectively cultivated.'[8]

Macaulay's will prevailed in spite of such opposition because his attitude was in sync with the newly consolidated political ascendancy

of the East India Company. The assertion of cultural supremacy is always related to political power. In the tentative phase of the Company's military forays in India, its employees were less bigoted and more flexible in their cultural interactions. By the time Macaulay arrived, the Company's paramountcy was near complete. Siraj-ud-Daula had been defeated at Plassey in 1757; Mir Qasim had capitulated at Buxar in 1764; and soon thereafter the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, had granted to Clive in perpetuity diwani, or suzerainty, over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Tipu Sultan of Mysore had been routed in 1799, and the Marathas in 1803 and again in 1819. With the defeat of the French in 1761, there was no outside power to challenge British supremacy in India. It is to the credit of the Orientalists that they retained a considerable degree of cultural eclecticism in spite of these British victories on the battlefield. But even they were never in doubt that they represented a civilization meant to rule. The earnest and high-minded members of the Asiatic Society investigating Indian culture did not allow a non-European to join the Society until 1829, forty-five years after it was founded, even though the translations and compilations they turned out were greatly dependent upon an army of Indian experts in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. On arrival in Calcutta in 1814, around the same time that Colebrooke's critical edition of the *Amarakosha* was published, Lord Hastings noted in his journal: 'The Hindu appears a being nearly limited to mere animal functions, and even in them indifferent [possessing] no higher intellect than a dog, an elephant or a monkey.'[9]

The dichotomy between the diligent appreciation of Indian antiquity and comments such as these can only be understood in the context of the swagger that political power gives even to cultural appreciation. The Company had material wealth and military might. Even its minor functionaries were surrounded by a battery of native servants: khidmatgars, durbans, syces, dhobis, bhistis (water carriers), hircarras (messengers), pankha-wallahs, palanquin bearers, doreahs (dog keepers and walkers), malis, khansamas, ayahs and sweepers. Such a milieu was a natural incubator for notions of cultural, even moral, superiority and racial arrogance. Indians were always referred to as blacks (Clive had noted with wry satisfaction that of the seventy or so casualties the Company had suffered at Plassey, most were 'blacks'), but now the

word nigger came into vogue. Lieutenant Colonel H.B. Henderson, who served in India in the first half of the nineteenth century, and published his recollections in 1829, summed up the attitude of many Company officials: 'No native, however high his rank, ought to approach within a yard of an Englishman; and every time an English shakes hands with a Babu he shakes the basis on which our ascendancy stands.'[10]

To get a sense of the link between power and culture, it is instructive to note how dramatically different was the behaviour of the first British envoy when he met, some two hundred years earlier, Prince Khurram and Emperor Jahangir. The Mughal empire was then at its zenith, and although Britain was emerging as a naval power of some consequence, India at that time accounted for almost one-fourth of global trade. The resplendence of the Mughal court was fabled, and its cultural refinements and patronage of the arts legendary. In 1614, James I sent Sir Thomas Roe as his envoy to the court of Jahangir at Agra with the object of obtaining protection for an English factory in the port town of Surat. Roe was an influential diplomat. He was appointed esquire to the body of Queen Elizabeth I, was knighted by James I in 1605, and was very close to Henry, the Prince of Wales, and his sister Elizabeth. In his journal of the mission to the Mughal empire, he describes how he was received by the Indian royals. His first meeting was not with Jahangir, but with his son, Prince Khurram (later Emperor Shah Jahan), who was then the Governor of Surat.

The British envoy was received by the kotwal at the gate of the outer court, where a hundred men on horseback stood guard. In the inner court, to which he was escorted, Roe saw the prince seated on a raised platform under a royal canopy with rich carpets spread all around him. The press of noble personages and officers was so great that he could not come close to the throne. He was asked to take off his hat and instructed 'how to touch the Ground with my bare Head'. He complied with the first but refused to do the second. He did manage, however, to extend to him 'that Reverence that I judged agreeable' from a distance, which the prince acknowledged by a mere gesture of his body. He would have liked to get a chair, but was told that no man could sit in court in the royal presence. He was allowed, though, to 'ease my self, by leaning on one of the Pillars that supported his Canopy', and he felt that on the whole he was treated in a manner 'sufficiently courteous and obliging'. 'The State and Pride of the Indian Princes,' he noted, '[is] intolerable, and they will hardly upon any account whatsoever, abate the least Punctilio of Ceremony and Respect.'

A little later Roe called upon Jahangir himself at Ajmer, where the emperor was on camp. The ceremony was much the same, if a little more elaborate, with even more of the nobility standing reverently below the throne. 'When I came into the presence, and had made my several reverences to him, he was pleased to prevent my dull Interpreter and begin himself, bidding me heartily welcome; welcome to him who was the Friend and Brother of my Master the King of England. He curiously viewed his Majesty's Letters, my own Commission as Ambassador, and the Presents I brought him in my King's name.' Jahangir could hardly conceal his contempt for the presents offered, but the other Europeans later told Roe that this notwithstanding he was received by the Mughal emperor with 'more Expressions of Grace and Good Will than any Ambassador had been before'.

It is obvious that in his own account of how he was received Roe would seek to salvage his self-respect as the British King's envoy, but it is very clear that he was both genuinely deferential and quite overawed by the ceremonials of the Mughal court. About Jahangir's royal processions he recorded that 'the Elephants, Horses and all sorts of carriages [were] present in such full abundance, that one would have fancied it almost the remove of a whole Nation'. The royal camps were equally a marvel: an open plain would be transformed at great speed into a city, 'divided into Streets, adorned and covered over with the splendid Pavilions of Princes and Courtiers, and all this Glory rise up in a few moments'. Roe was greatly impressed too by the skill and mastery of Indian artists. 'I could not have thought,' he wrote, 'that India had produced artists so skillful and ingenious, as I have seen by some Pieces which His Majesty shewd me.' As Jahangir got to know Roe better, a friendship of sorts developed between them. Roe was invited to the emperor's birthday, and drank to 'his Health in a Noble Cup of Gold, set with Emeralds, Turquoises and Rubies', which Jahangir casually offered as a present to him. The only things that Roe records Jahangir expressing his interest in were 'the tall Irish Grey

Hounds, which he seemed most passionately to desire, and ... some of our English Embroideries ...'

The letter of King James which Roe carried referred to Jahangir as 'the high and mighty Monarch the Great Mogol, King of the Oriental Indies, of Candahar, of Chismer and Corazon, &c.', and acknowledged the 'great Favour towards Us and Our Subjects' by allowing the English to carry on 'quiet Trade and Commerce without any kind of hindrance and molestation'. Jahangir's reply was in the extravagant Oriental tradition; while James spoke of 'Utility and Profit', the emperor emphasized how he had been satisfied by the English sovereign's 'tender Love towards me', and was assured that this love 'shall never be forgotten, but as the Smell of Amber, or as a Garden of fragrant Flowers, whose Beauty and Odour is still increasing ... shall grow and increase with yours'.[11]

Power gives to human interactions across cultural divides a very recognizable body language. Around a hundred and fifty years later, on 12 August 1865, a vanquished Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, met another British representative, Lord Clive, in very different circumstances. The meeting took place at Allahabad Fort where Shah Alam was to sign away Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the Company. A large oil canvas by a contemporary artist Benjamin West, now a prized display at the Victoria Memorial Museum in Kolkata, graphically depicts the scene. Clive is dressed in a long redcoat and white stockings, with a royal blue sash around his waist. The Mughal emperor is seated on a throne, wearing a white angarkha and a bejewelled turban. Three steps lead up to the throne, and servants with whisks of peacock feathers fan the beleaguered monarch. But nothing can hide the triumphant and superior stance of Clive, as standing nearby he looks down at Shah Alam, who has no other option but to give away annual revenues estimated at £33 million for a yearly stipend of £272,000. That look encapsulates in an instant everything that would change in the next two centuries: a once proud and refined culture accepting its inferiority before a rising alien power.

Macaulay, the author of the Minute on Education in India, was a quintessential product of this process of British conquest and political and economic ascendancy. He drew a princely salary of £10,000 a year and spent less than £100 annually on the army of servants he employed; he kept house, as he admitted himself, more handsomely than any other member of the Council; as part of his daily routine he read French and Greek to his sister Hannah after lunch; in the evening he went out in his carriage for a drive along the river front, with servants running alongside. With unlimited arrogance and complete conviction he could thus say: 'Give a boy *Robinson Crusoe*. That's worth all the grammar of rhetoric and logic in the world.' And, in his Minute on Education he could write: 'It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position is nearly the same.'

Macaulay's brother-in-law George Trevelyan was, if anything, even more contemptuous of the culture of the natives and more convinced of the need to bring in English as quickly as possible as the sole medium of instruction. Macaulay, a bachelor himself, had come to Calcutta with his sister, Hannah, whom he dearly loved. Trevelyan, a young officer of the Company, met her socially soon after their arrival. In December 1834, they were married, and Trevelyan moved into Macaulay's home. Trevelyan was imbued with a missionary zeal to 'uplift' the natives. Macaulay noted that his 'mind is full of schemes of moral and political improvement and his zeal boils over in his talk ... His topics, even in courtship, are steam navigation and the education of the natives ...' One of Trevelyan's pet causes was to replace the scripts of all the Indian languages with the Roman script, so as to end the 'curse of Babel', and help the formation of a national literature wholly based upon that of 'the civilized world of Europe'. According to him there was no synonym in the local languages for words like 'virtue' or 'public spirit' or 'patriotism' or 'honour'. In 1834, after the adoption as government policy of his brother-in-law's minute, Trevelyan gloated that Lord Bentinck would be remembered by posterity because 'in his time the Oriental mania which broke out under Lord Wellesley's government; advanced under Lord Minto's; was in the height of its career under Lord Hastings'; and began to flag under Lord Amherst's, has completely exhausted itself.'[12]

The crucial aspect to introspect about is what impact this dismissal

of their language and literature had on the Indians themselves. The vast majority, illiterate and impoverished under their new rulers as they had been under many of the old, were of course condemned to uncritical servility and not equipped to follow the arguments between the Anglicists and the Orientalists. But what about the educated Indian elite, who were knowledgeable about their literary and cultural heritage and should have been sensitive to the contempt with which it was being evaluated? The debate among the British was carried out in the open and for a considerable period of time; to every statement from the Orientalists, there was a spirited riposte from the opposite side. When William Jones compared Kalidasa to Shakespeare, Trevelyan countered by saying that 'the more popular forms of [Oriental literature] are marked by the greatest immorality and impurity'. The Utilitarian James Mill argued that the 'lyricism and sentiment in Indian drama' was 'a mark of a self-indulgent society', and this in turn was the 'product of a despotic state'. Refined people would not, Mill argued, countenance the marriage that took place in the forest in Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* between the heroine and her lover, where sinfully 'two lovers contract from the desire of amorous embraces'. Trevelyan was emphatic that the British did not need to spend any money to publish 'erotic Sanskrit dramas teaching lechery in its most seductive forms'.

Were the members of the Indian elite outraged by this? Did they protest the arbitrary imposition of a foreign language and the trashing of their own, or did they become colluders in the perpetuation of the Company's agenda?

An instructive way to try and understand the response of the Indian elite is to study the life of perhaps the most famous of its members then, Raja Rammohan Roy. The purpose is not to pass judgement on the well-intentioned choices he made. Individuals are products of their time and circumstance, and it is unfair to judge them in hindsight. But even so, it is useful to explore the subtle and direct ways in which colonial rule co-opts the ruled and makes them accessories in its project. Under the imperial gaze of the ruler, the victim goes through

a complex process of emotions: resentment, denial, loss of self-worth, acquiescence, emulation and, ultimately, capitulation. He is often unable to distinguish between the erosion of self-respect and the pursuit of material incentives, between long-term loss and short-term gain, and between what he needs to retain and what he must reject from his own inheritance. The discourse within the ruling group on what is the best course for him has a mesmerizing and beguiling effect. He genuinely believes that his own interests are at the centre of this debate, and that the view that finally prevails is in his best interest. The subtext to this process of cultural co-option is, of course, power, but the victim does not see it so starkly. He believes that the choice he is making is of his own free will, and that the adoption of elements of the ruler's culture is his rightful destiny. He feels empowered.

Rammohan Roy was born in 1772 in the village of Radhanagar in Hooghly district. His father claimed descent from Narottam Thakur, a prominent follower of the fifteenth-century Vaishnava saint Chaitanya. His mother's forebears were chief priests of the Sakta sect, and she spent her last years in the Jagannath temple at Puri. Roy was himself very religious, and indeed contemplated becoming a sanyasi at the age of fourteen. It is said that he would not even drink water without first reciting a chapter of the *Bhagwata Purana*. His early education was in Bengali, and by the age of fifteen he had mastered Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. He did not learn English until he was twenty-four, and his first introduction to western culture and literature was almost a decade later when he took up employment in the East India Company as an assistant to a minor functionary, John Digby. As a hard-working clerk in the Rangpur collectorate, Roy was treated well by Digby, who had apparently asked his British colleagues not to keep his assistant standing in their presence, something which even the highest placed natives were expected to do.

After ten years of service, Roy took voluntary retirement and settled down in Calcutta in a house he had built in the European style. (The inclination of a few among the Bengali elite to adopt western lifestyles had already been noted with smug satisfaction by the British. Bishop Reginald Hebber recorded that they had begun to decorate their houses with Corinthian pillars and acquire English-style furniture.) In Calcutta, Roy organized the Atmiya Sabha, where members of the

Bengali elite would meet to discuss ways to 'uplift' Indians from the degradation they had fallen into. The desire of some urbanized and wealthy natives in Calcutta to study European literature and science had become quite vocal, and Roy helped David Hare, an English merchant, and Sir Hyde East, Chief Justice of Bengal, to set up the Hindu College, whose avowed purpose was to abjure Hindu theology and metaphysics in favour of western history, literature and natural sciences. Roy was also very supportive of Christian missionaries entering the field of education. The Reverend Alexander Duff of the Church of Scotland was one of the first to respond. When he had difficulty in finding premises for his school, Rammohan put a hall at his disposal. On the first day a Bible was placed in the hands of the children, but Roy placated the protesting parents and students. Three hundred applicants had come for admission in a hall that could accommodate only a hundred and twenty. According to Duff, the students begged to be taken in. This is how he records their pleas: "Me want read your good books; oh, take me" "Me good boy" "Me poor boy" "Me know your commandments: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me; oh, take me" "Oh take me, and I pray for you".[13]

On 11 December 1823, Roy wrote a petition to Governor General Lord Amherst against the teaching of Sanskrit and for the introduction of western sciences. The document makes for remarkable reading:

> The Sanskrit language, so difficult that almost a lifetime is necessary for its perfect acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge; and the learning concealed under this almost impervious veil is far from sufficient to reward the labour of acquiring it . . . no improvement can be expected from inducing young men to consume a dozen of years of the most valuable period of their lives in acquiring the Byakaran of Sanskrit Grammar. For instance, in learning to discuss such points as the following: *khad*, signifying to eat, *khaaduti*, he or she or it eats. Query, whether does the word *khaaduti*, taken as a whole, convey the meaning *he*, or *she*, or *it* eats or are separate parts of this meaning conveyed by distinct portions of the word? As if in the English language it were asked, how much meaning is there in the word *eat*, how much in the [letter] *s*, and is the whole meaning of the word conveyed by these portions of it distinctly, or by them taken jointly?
>
> Neither can such improvements arise from such speculations as the following, which are the themes suggested by the Vedant: In what manner is the soul absorbed in the Deity? What relation does it bear to the divine essence? Nor will youths be fitted to be better members of society by the Vedantic doctrines which teach them to believe that all visible things have no real existence . . . Again, no material benefit can be derived by the student of the Meemangsa from knowing what it is that makes the killer of the goat sinless on pronouncing certain passages of the Veda . . . Again, the student of the Nyaya Shastra cannot be said to have improved his mind after he learned into how many ideal classes the objects in the Universe are divided, and what speculative relation the soul bears to the body, the body to the soul, the eye to the ear etc.[14]

Roy's motivations in writing this petition were laudable. He wanted the study of western mathematics, chemistry and anatomy, clearly more advanced at this time than eastern or Indian science, to be available to Indian students. He argued for European teachers and for educational institutions to have the necessary books and scientific instruments for this new curriculum. But the important point is that in order to ask for this he had to ridicule his own civilization and heritage. As a learned student of Sanskrit, he must have known that the language was not confined only to the futile tedium of splitting infinitives: Panini's majestic work on Sanskrit grammar, the *Ashtadhyayi*, with which the history of linguistics begins, was written in the fourth century BC, at a time when the British were centuries away from speaking a coherent language. The six systems of Hindu philosophy constitute one of the most sophisticated metaphysical structures the world has known, and even as he dismissed the *Nyaya Shastra*, Roy must have been aware of the brilliance of this second-century AD text that deals, through its emphasis on debate and example, with the science of correct knowledge. Again, as a student of Vedanta Roy could not have been ignorant of the fact that Shankaracharya's speculation on the real and the unreal was in essence a deeply insightful inquiry into the nature of reality.

The irony is that only a few years before his petition to Amherst, Roy had authored scholarly works on the Kena, Isa, Katha and Mandukya Upanishads, and brought out a compendium of the Vedanta doctrines, the *Vedantasara*. What, then, made him damn his linguistic and philosophical heritage so spectacularly? If it was a tactical ploy, to gain the support of British authorities or to rebut his critics within the orthodox Hindu establishment, it must nevertheless have been deeply humiliating to endorse the superficial yet relentless criticism of his culture by the Anglicists.

For the Anglicists, of course, Roy was an important ally—'that enlightened native', as William Bentinck referred to him. In fact, it is interesting to note that in Macaulay's infamous minute, one of the examples he gives to rubbish Indian civilization, is taken straight from Roy's petition. In his letter, Roy had reduced the legacy of the Mimamsa school of philosophy merely to passages that need to be recited to expiate the killing of a goat; a decade later Macaulay wrote that all that the 'Hindoos' learnt from studying their texts was 'how to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat'. And yet, even if Roy was an ally, he was never to forget the limits of his brief. As a student of religion, and as an unabashed votary of the west's civilizing mission, he had studied the Bible in both Hebrew and Greek. However, when he tried to extend to Christianity the same rational approach that informed his criticism of orthodox Hinduism, 'a volley of theological thunder' was directed his way from the Church and the British establishment. In several articles Roy had sought to separate the spiritual message of Christianity from its doctrinal fiats, and to rationally assess the miracle stories of the Gospel. But the very people who held him up as a role model for his critique of the obscurantisms in his own religion, now viciously attacked him. The influential journal *Friends of India*, which was published by the Baptist Missionary Society at Serampore, denounced him as 'an intelligent heathen, whose mind is as yet completely opposed to the grand design of the Saviour's becoming incarnate'. Roy greatly protested the use of the word 'heathen'. It implied an exclusion which was especially hurtful to him.

Much the same happened on other issues where Roy, perhaps simplistically, believed that he could appeal to British rationality and

liberalism. When he protested in 1823 (the same year that his petition against Sanskrit was received so well by the British) against restrictions imposed on a Bengali paper that he edited, his petition to the Supreme Court in Calcutta was rebuffed, and his appeal to the King and Privy Council met with the same fate. The lines were clearly drawn, and Roy was left in no doubt about where he belonged, however eloquent his admiration for the rulers. This had been made amply clear even earlier at a personal level. In 1809, Sir Frederick Hamilton, a British official, had publicly abused Roy for not getting out of his palanquin to greet him. Roy had tried to explain that he had not seen the official as the palanquin doors were shut to keep out the dust of the road. But to no avail. Later, in a letter to Governor General Lord Minto, dated 12 April 1809, Roy protested this kind of behaviour, while expressing full confidence in the impartial justice of the British government. 'Your petitioner is aware,' he wrote, 'that the spirit of the British laws would not tolerate an act of arbitrary aggression, even against the lowest class of individuals, but much less would it continue an unjust degradation of persons of respectability . . .' There is no evidence that his petition merited a reply, leave alone any kind of action against the arrogant Sir Hamilton.

Perhaps the most celebrated cause espoused by Roy was for the abolition of sati. It is said that the sight of his brother's widow being burnt alive on her husband's funeral pyre created a sense of deep sorrow and revulsion in him. In 1818 he issued his first pamphlet denouncing the custom, and cited Hindu sacred literature as sanction for his viewpoint. Two years later, he issued another polemic, this time quoting Hindu law. This was followed by the publication of a booklet entitled 'Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance'. The Bengali paper he brought out, *Sambad Kaumudi*, was equally vocal in its condemnation. On this issue, Roy was an eloquent and very genuine social reformer, seeking to rid his society of inhuman practices for which the fanatically orthodox claimed religious sanction. Naturally, the British were supportive of such a campaign, not the least because it reinforced their claim that they were dealing with a barbaric and depraved people who needed to be saved from themselves. In his study of the ideologies of the Raj, Professor Thomas Metcalfe of the

University of Cambridge emphasizes that 'the dramatic representations of these evils was essential to the self-image of the Raj'. 'Few of their activities in India,' he writes, 'gave the British greater satisfaction than this vision of themselves as the reformers of Indian morality.'[15] Lord Bentinck, who steered the Act abolishing sati in 1829, had a larger-than-life statue commissioned showing him dramatically rescuing an Indian woman from the funeral pyre. This piece of sculpture can still be seen in the compound of the Victoria Memorial Museum, but was at that time placed prominently at a central location in Calcutta.

Sati was indeed a heinous custom. But it is important to understand the contradictions and cynicism that informed British intervention on the issue. When the British were still consolidating their rule in the subcontinent, they were happy to ignore issues like sati that were to become so central to their 'civilizing' mission once they had established their military and political supremacy and wanted to buttress that with the notion of moral and intellectual superiority. In his 1829 report, 'On Ritual Murder in India', Bentinck wrote: 'When we had powerful neighbours and had greater reason to doubt our own security, expediency might recommend an indirect and more cautious proceeding, but now that we are supreme my opinion is decidedly in favour of an open, avowed, and general prohibition . . .' In fact, in 1813, the British had *legalized* sati. While there was never any consensus even among upper-caste Hindus about scriptural sanction for the practice of sati, the British authorities legitimized it by saying that it did.

Several Indian scholars and reformers had been speaking against the practice of sati and highlighting that it was not enjoined in any religious text that a widow burn herself on her husband's pyre. Among them were Mritunjay Vidyalankar, Gourisankara Bhattacharya, Kalinath Roy Chowdhury and others. They were all ignored and the 1813 law legalizing sati was passed. Later, too, reformers continued to work against the practice of sati—chief among them, of course, was Rammohan Roy. Many of them understood the true nature of sati, as a social aberration, and knew that the best way to fight it was from within, through reform. Rammohan Roy himself was not in favour of official intervention and had advised Bentinck *against* British intervention and legislation. It was valuable advice and he felt strongly

about it. Yet, when Regulation XVII of 1829 abolishing sati was promulgated, he gave it uncritical, unqualified and public support.

It is also important to remember that sati was never as widespread or as rampant as the public campaign orchestrated against it would suggest. The British talked about numbers in the thousands, and that it was the practice among all Hindus across the subcontinent. Bentinck, in his 'On Ritual Murder in India', wrote, 'I have no doubt that the conscientious belief of every order of Hindus, with few exceptions, regards [sati] as sacred . . .', without of course providing any basis for his conviction. However, in records and writings of the time, there is enough evidence to the contrary, and several contemporary scholars have written about this—most notably, Anand A. Yang and Lata Mani. The incidence of sati was largely limited to certain castes, even families, and was almost unknown outside parts of eastern and northern India. Between 1815 and 1828, 63 per cent of all recorded acts of sati took place in Calcutta Division (interestingly, this was then the seat of colonial power).[16] In 1824, looking at the data compiled by the British themselves, of the 250,000 women who became widows in the Bengal Presidency, the number of those reported to have burned themselves was 600—that is, 0.2 per cent of the overall number of widows.[17] The data for Varanasi, the most holy of cities for Hindus, is even more revealing. The incidence of sati was very limited here, and 'the Banaras magistrate noted with surprise—in an obvious ethnocentric manner—that only 125 cases had occurred in the nine years between 1820 and 1828'.[18] Clearly, sati was 'a localized, secular phenomenon, not a universal, religious one'.[19] But the British exaggerated it enormously since it could be used to discredit the Hindu way of life and legitimize British rule. After the regulation abolishing sati was promulgated, the prominent missionary William Carey wrote: '. . . for the first time during twenty centuries . . . the Ganges flowed unblooded to the sea.'[20]

A similar case of deliberate colonial exaggeration and misrepresentation was that of the so-called thugs. The thugs were ordinary dacoits, but not even a tenth as exotic or pervasive as the British made them out to be. Although largely confined to a small region of north India, they were projected as a threat of such magnitude and reach that an observer would not have been wrong in believing that all of Indian society was representative of their violence and

duplicity. Plays were made on them and sensationalist novels written on their secretive and murderous activities; indeed, the word thug entered the English language. 'The campaign against Sati,' Metcalfe concludes, 'reinforced notions of Indian women as helpless victims of religion, while lurid tales of the doings of the thugs powerfully reinforced the idea of Indians as treacherous and unreliable.'[21]

Roy was probably unaware that his idealism suited so well the larger purposes of British rule. Protests against their own culture by the natives provided the moral ground on which the British sought to build their imperial edifice. They appropriated and twisted the well-intentioned and often genuinely reformist campaigns of Indian intellectuals in order to give ideological justification to their empire. The denigration of the Sanskrit language, and the culture and philosophy associated with it, devalued an entire civilizational heritage, and thus strengthened the rulers' project of imposing their own culture and language on the ruled. There was, of course, much that was wrong at that time with the practice of Hindu religion and the social customs it sanctioned. But selective focus on the most barbaric of these was vital collateral evidence to support the colonial contention that they were dealing with a sunken civilization that only *their* rule could hope to salvage. Perhaps Roy cannot be blamed for being co-opted into this imperial game, but it is crucial to understand the subtext of his interaction in such matters with the British, and their selective support for his reformist initiatives.

For his own society and religion, Roy was a scriptural non-conformist, a brave and enlightened man. In 1828 he set up the Brahmo Samaj, founded on the principles of one God and universal brotherhood beyond distinctions of caste or creed. Such an approach was nothing short of revolutionary in the times in which he lived. But in his dealings with the British, he compromised his independence and individuality, and let himself be co-opted into endorsing the vision they wanted the natives to have of themselves. 'Rammohan Roy had an unbounded faith in the sense of justice and goodness of the British government,' writes the historian R.C. Mazumdar, 'and accepted the British rule as an act of Divine Providence . . . and glorified the role played by them for civilizing the Indians.' On 15 December 1829, in a meeting at the Calcutta Town Hall, Roy publicly stated that 'the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs'. He even went on to praise the British indigo planters, the effects of whose rapacious rack-renting on the lives of farmers and farm workers in Bihar and Bengal were already apparent. 'There may be some partial injury done by the indigo planters,' Roy said, 'but on the whole they have performed more good to the generality of the natives of this country than any other class of Europeans whether or not out of service.' Around this time he also wrote to the French botanist and geologist Victor Jacquemont: 'Conquest is very rarely an evil when the conquering people are more civilized than the conquered, because the former brings to the latter the benefits of civilization. India requires many more years of English civilization so that she may not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence.'

On 19 November 1830 Roy sailed on the *Albion* for England. The voyage had long been an aspiration for him. According to the Missionary Register brought out by the church at Serampore, he had expressed a desire as far back as 1814 to study at Oxford or Cambridge. But now he was going as the envoy of the Mughal emperor Akbar Shah (who conferred on him the title Raja), to petition the King of England for an increase in the indigent monarch's annual pension. Roy arrived at Liverpool on 8 April 1832, and became, for the common man, an object of great curiosity. The *Calcutta Literary Gazette* recorded that 'when this tall, well-built, handsome, aristocrat scholar-reformer passed through the streets of Liverpool, Manchester and London in his typical oriental, embroidered long gown and attractive, shining turban, huge crowds of men, women and children rushed to see him. He was cheered as the "King of Ingee" and the people shouted "Long live Tippoo Saheb".' The brave but ill-fated Tipu had died at British hands several decades earlier on 4 May 1799, but the common Englishman could perhaps be forgiven—given the general level of ignorance about India, the colony that kept their economy running—for mistaking him for Roy. The elite circles of London, however, made no mistake and warmly embraced him. For them he was a poster boy for the transformation they hoped they would be able to bring about in the natives.

Roy was befriended by the Lord Chancellor and Jeremy Bentham,

given dinner by the board of directors of the East India Company, and received by King William IV in audience (perhaps the first Indian to be so honoured), who also invited him to his coronation and to the opening of the London Bridge. None of these invitations were extended to him in his capacity as the ambassador of the Mughal emperor. Nor did his petition to the English king on behalf of the beleaguered sovereign at Delhi bear any results. He was welcomed because he was perceived to be an ally and a living endorsement of the kind of subjects Britain wanted to create in India. *The Times* made this amply clear in a piece on 13 June 1831: 'We hail his arrival as the harbinger of those fruits which must result from the dissemination of European knowledge and literature, and of those sound principles of rule and government which is the solemn obligation of Great Britain to extend to her vast and interesting empire in the east. We have in Rammohan Roy an example of what we may expect from such an enlightened course of policy.'

It is telling that the condescension, even though politely expressed, was not noticed by Roy. By all accounts he quite revelled in his celebrity status, and for a short while was sufficiently carried away to move into a luxurious home at Cumberland Terrace in Regent's Park, till probably his money ran out. But his curiosity value was undiminished. The sustained level of interest in Roy was not surprising because he must have been one of the first natives to be actually seen speaking English in England. When Roy spoke at the Unitarian Chapel in English, the excitement in the crowd was, according to the *Calcutta Gazette*, extreme. Often this lack of knowledge about the anglicization of the natives led to rather amusing incidents. At Liverpool, Roy ran into a rather low-level British functionary, now retired from service in India, who, as Mazumdar describes it, had a look of self-satisfaction on his face, and 'was much more gifted with good nature than good sense or good taste'. The moment this man saw Roy, he began to speak to him in 'that elegant dialect in which Europeans . . . make their coup d'essai in Eastern languages. "Ucha, toom Bengali, hum Bengali, toom Bengali, well, kysa hai." It took some time for the officer to realize that Roy could speak English better than him, although our Raja kept gracefully bowing in response. In fact, Roy's general demeanour of deference was commented on by some of those who met him. 'I used to feel quite overwhelmed by the reverential manner in which he behaved to me,' recalled an English lady. 'Had I been a queen, I could not have been approached or taken leave of with more respect.'

On 14 July 1832, Roy was given the privilege to speak at the Select Committee of the House of Commons. In his remarks, he strongly argued for the settlement of Europeans in India. This would, he emphasized, lead to the cultivation of the English language throughout the country. In addition, it would introduce superior modes of cultivating the soil, deliver the natives from superstition and prejudice, improve the legal and judicial system, protect the natives from the oppression of their native landlords, prevent invasion, and put the connection between Great Britain and India on a solid and permanent footing. But that was not all. Roy actually went so far as to advocate a 'mixed community of India', mixed with European stock, so that there would be 'no disposition to cut off its connection with England, which may be preserved with so much mutual benefit to both countries'. His further request to the British Parliament was that 'educated persons of character and capital should now be permitted and encouraged to settle in India, without any restriction of locality or liability to banishment, at the discretion of the government; and the result of this experiment may serve as a guide in any future legislation on this subject'.

The next year, Roy went to Bristol at the invitation of Lant Carpenter, the head of the Unitarian Church. He stayed as the guest of a Mrs Castle at Beech House in Stapleton Grove. Ten days after his arrival he fell ill with meningitis, and died on 27 September 1833. British law did not allow for cremation in those days, so he was buried. A decade later his remains were re-interred at the Arnos Vale cemetery in a tomb designed by the architect William Prinsep and paid for by the zamindar and entrepreneur Dwarkanath Tagore—grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore—who had famously declared that 'the happiness of India is best secured by her connection with England'.

In August 2005, my wife and I journeyed to Bristol to pay our respects to this brilliant man who wanted to do so much for his countrymen but ended up passionately arguing in the highest public forum of Great Britain for the continuation and strengthening of colonial rule. We were met at the Arnos Vale cemetery by Carla

Carpenter, a spirited English lady. Carla is married to an Indian from a distinguished Parsi family, and had lived in India for many years. But when she and her husband came to settle down in Bristol some years ago, her life's mission became to resurrect and preserve the memory of Rammohan Roy. When she had returned, the memorial built for him at the cemetery was in disrepair. The owner of the cemetery, a certain Mr Tony Towner, wanted to dispose of it for more lucrative construction projects, and none of the Indians in Bristol knew that someone of the eminence of Roy was buried in their town. The petite and articulate Carla went about changing all this. With the help of the local town council she fought off Mr Towner, raised funds for the upkeep and maintenance of the memorial, and lobbied with the municipal authorities and the Indian High Commission to do more in Bristol in the Raja's memory. Every year on 25 August she organized a meeting at the memorial to invoke his name, and more often than not the Indian High Commissioner came down from London to attend it.

The tomb, as Carla agreed with me, was far from aesthetic. Prinsep had made several drawings, but the one chosen tried, typically, to combine both British and Indian architectural motifs, and ended up doing justice to neither. Octagonal in shape, the monument has a cluster of three pillars in four corners, and a rather awkward chhatri perched on top. The roof is painted a jarring purple, while the pillars and niches and the chhatri are green. The sun was high in the sky when we visited the tomb, but it was pleasant in the shade and a cool breeze rustled the maple trees. As Carla talked on about Roy and her campaign in Bristol, I stood silently by his tomb, my mind trying to grapple with the contradictions in the life of this complex, sincere and talented person, who was born in a village in Bengal but found his final resting place in a city he hardly knew, thousands of miles away from home. The British looked upon him benignly, as their creation, and he did not let them down. The City Museum in Bristol commissioned a life-size portrait of Roy towards the end of the nineteenth century, soon after Max Mueller gave a lecture there on the Raja. Done by Henry Bricks, who later became Queen Victoria's chief portrait painter, it is tucked away on the third floor, between dwarfing replicas of dinosaurs and an antique piano. The Raja looks imposing in black tunic and yellow turban, with a jamewar shawl over his shoulder and a book in his hand. In the background one can make out a temple and a mosque. The label on the portrait describes him as the first Hindu reformer. The British did not have to say any more. The need for reform presupposed a decadent and backward society, and the fact that he was portrayed as the first reformer made him an example of their civilizing intervention.

The Brahmo Samaj, which was a creation of Roy, also kept to this brief. The original plaque at the tomb had simply stated: 'Rammohan Roy, died Stapleton, 1833.' In 1870, the Samaj added a new plaque that, recalling his scholarship and belief in the unity of godhead, concluded: 'His unwearied labours to promote the social, moral and physical condition of the people of India, his earnest endeavours to suppress idolatry, and the rite of suttee, and his constant zealous advocacy of whatever tended to advance the glory of God and the welfare of man live in the grateful remembrance of his countrymen.' The emphasis here is again only on his reformist profile, which draws attention afresh to the moral degeneration of the natives. The tribute is sanitized of all other elements, for anything else, least of all anything that approximated an objective assessment, would have brought in aspects of the process of imperial subversion which would be uncomfortable both to the British and to Roy's followers. Over a hundred years later, the amnesia induced by colonial rule made the leaders of free India perpetuate this selective assessment. In the foyer of the Bristol Council House is a bust of Roy that was gifted on 27 April 1995 by the then chief minister of West Bengal, Jyoti Basu. Carla remarked that many residents of Bristol still ask why you need a bust of an Indian in the foyer of their city council. Two years later a larger-than-life bronze statue was installed in the very heart of Bristol, next to the Cathedral and the City Library. As in his portrait, the Raja is shown standing, a long tunic over his trousers, a shawl across his shoulders and a book in one hand. The statue was presented by the then Indian High Commissioner Dr L.M. Singhvi. The plaque simply states: 'Philosopher, Reformer, Patriot, Scholar.'

Many of the contradictions that colonialism creates are mirrored vividly in the life of the Raja. He was a scholar of Hindu thought and philosophy, yet publicly ridiculed its contents. A master of the Sanskrit

language, he openly condemned its learning and teaching—and yet, when attacked by the missionaries for his thoughts on the Gospel, he was forced to defend himself by citing examples from the Vedanta, whose legacy he had otherwise dismissed. His stated aim was to revive the fortunes of his countrymen; yet he made a declaration at the House of Commons on the need for Indians to be ruled in perpetuity by the British. An ardent believer in the civilizing role of British rule, he was forced to protest against the uncivilized behaviour of British officials. While he paid open tribute to the justice and liberality of British laws, his appeal against the arbitrary censorship imposed by them, or their unjust treatment of the Mughal emperor in Delhi, never elicited a response.

In his personal life, the Raja was caught in the not unfamiliar existential dilemma of the colonized. It is said that he had two houses in Calcutta, one in which everything was western except him, and the other in which everything was Indian except himself. A man committed to reform in Hindu society, he dedicated his petition against sati to Lady Hastings. He made it his mission to oppose the blind orthodoxies of the Hindu religion, yet took along Hindu servants to cook his food, and two cows to provide him pure milk, on the voyage to England. Eager to fulfil his long-standing desire to visit England, a country he so openly admired, he was greatly inconvenienced on the ship when he could not find an open fire on which his meals could be made in accordance with Brahmanical notions of purity. While he was immensely gratified to have been received in audience by the English king, and, indeed, argued for India to have a mixed community enriched by European stock, he objected to being attended by English nurses during his last days in Bristol. On his deathbed, he expressed a wish not to be buried in a cemetery or with Christian rites, yet he was buried and not cremated. His memorial was designed by a Britisher, but its costs were defrayed by an Indian who did not, however, think it necessary to have anything inscribed on the monument in Bengali or Sanskrit, the two languages Roy knew better than any other.

Roy was both the creation and the victim of colonial policy. To be successful, such a policy must create the illusion of choice before the native, and give to its brute military power a softer tone of deliberation, fairness and liberality. It must be able to co-opt the native into perpetuating its designs, often without his knowing it. And it must be able to both sense, and engage with, his aspirations and dissatisfactions in a manner that actually furthers the rulers' objectives but convinces the ruled that this is in his interest. It is most unlikely that a man as learned and intelligent as Roy would have become such an articulate acolyte of the British if the latter had aggressively and simplistically dismissed everything Indian and forced the native elite at the point of a gun to learn English.

In the end, this is very nearly what they did, but the decision was preceded by a vigorous debate among the rulers on what should be the correct course to take. The Orientalists too were for the introduction of English but wished to retain the teaching of the vernacular languages so that the fruits of western science and learning could be grafted on to the achievements of Indian civilization and not replace them entirely. The Anglicists had no time for such nuances; they were fired by a newfound evangelical zeal, convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that English and Christianity were the two keys to the uplift of their primitive subjects. Theoretically, there was a choice before Roy: to go with the Orientalists, or support the Anglicists. The former option would have certainly been less humiliating, but impatient for reform in his own society and religion, he opted for the insensitive radicalism of the Anglicists. A critically important reason, no doubt, was that by the 1820s the Anglicist lobby was politically ascendant. For Roy, who sought the approbation of the British, this factor could not be overlooked, although—and this is a tribute to the British as colonizers—the course of action he pursued never appeared to him as anything less than the most high-minded idealism in the best interests of his countrymen.

Cultural imperialism, when backed by political power, can penetrate even the most improbable human citadels. The example of the great Urdu poet at Delhi, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, comes to mind, not the least because he was in many ways very much like Macaulay. Ghalib and Macaulay were contemporaries. Ghalib was born in 1797,

three years before Macaulay, and lived for a decade after him, until 1869. For almost six decades both these individuals, vastly separated in background and circumstance, lived, unknown to each other, overlapping lives against the backdrop of the British conquest of India.

Like Macaulay, Ghalib was inordinately proud of his culture and language. If Macaulay had mastered Latin as the key to understanding the Graeco-Roman heritage of his Anglo-Saxon culture, Ghalib was obstinately devoted to Persian as the link to his Persian–Turkish inheritance. Persian was fast being replaced by Urdu as the lingua franca in his time, but although he himself wrote exquisitely in the new language, and was a key figure in the literary efflorescence that accompanied its rise, Ghalib publicly belittled his Urdu verse and declared his loyalty to Persian and the resplendent feudal–monarchic order it represented. If Macaulay did not tire of recalling the virtues of western civilization, Ghalib was equally adamant in invoking the refinements of the House of Timur and the legendary kings of Persia. While Macaulay recalled the glories of ancient Rome (*The Lays of Ancient Rome)*, Ghalib wrote about the sacred dust of Turan, the glorious line of Pashang and Afrasiyab and the legacy of the Jamshid dynasty. Macaulay wrote a two-volume *History of England*; Ghalib worked on *Mihr-i-Nimroz*, an ambitious history of the Mughal dynasty. Macaulay was happiest poring over the works of Voltaire and Virgil; Ghalib could spend hours extolling the writings of Saadi and Hafiz. Both men were patrician, even arrogant, by temperament, extremely proud of their scholarly achievements and similar in their disinclination to suffer fools gladly. They went through life immersed in their own idiom to the exclusion of almost everything else: Macaulay, unlike many of his British peers, made no attempt to learn any of the Indian languages, or for that matter anything about Indian civilization; and Ghalib believed that there was very little else left to pursue if one could craft a masterly piece of verse in Persian or Urdu. Ghalib claimed to belong to the feudal aristocracy, although his ancestors were mercenaries who had prospered just about enough to allow such a claim. Macaulay's origins were also humbler than he was prepared to admit. Yet, both men considered themselves to be cultural aristocrats, and certainly the most knowledgeable and eloquent spokesmen of their language and history.

With so much that was common, there was one overwhelming difference. Ghalib was an indigent pensioner of a declining political order, while Macaulay was the imperious harbinger of ascendant British power. With this one difference, everything about them became different. The proud poet at Delhi tried to cling on to some semblance of feudal dignity on a monthly hereditary pension of 66 rupees per month, paid by the British for military services rendered by his grandfather. Macaulay lived in Calcutta on a salary of £10,000 a year, with scores of servants and subordinates to do his every bidding. Ghalib spent the best part of his life petitioning the British for what he believed was a legitimate claim for an increase in his share of the pension, getting his petitions translated—perhaps reluctantly—into English. Macaulay sat at the apex of the system where countless such petitions were heard and often disposed of without sufficient application of mind, and he of course had little patience for those who wrote petitions in any language other than English.

Macaulay was the spokesman of an emerging superpower, whose armadas were conquering new territories across the world. Pride and confidence came naturally to him as he deliberated in Calcutta on how to uplift the natives. But for Ghalib, it was a struggle to hold on to his pride in the changing times, especially when he was treated dismissively by the British. When this happened blatantly, he protested. Francis Hawkins, the officiating Resident at Delhi, was particularly offensive, and Ghalib was compelled to complain to the chief secretary at Calcutta that he was 'received in a manner totally unsuited to my Rank and Standing in the Scale of Asiatic Society and extremely ungratifying to my Feelings'. To the British the feelings of such remnants of a pensionary nobility were no longer of any great consequence.

Ghalib wrote sublime poetry, but the mushairas, the poetry readings, that were now held in the Mughal court were tawdry affairs—not for the quality of the poetry, but because the emperor himself was living in penury under stringent British tutelage. The once mighty Mughal empire had shrunk to the crowded area within the ramparts of the Red Fort. The renaissance in the Urdu language, of which Ghalib was such an important figure, was tainted by a decaying and impotent polity. Bahadur Shah Zafar, emperor only in name, was himself a poet and a

patron of poetry, but his court's meagre largesse could hardly award good poetry as in the old days. On occasion Ghalib reminded Zafar of the time of the great Mughals when poets were frequently weighed against silver and gold and rubies. In an ode in honour of Queen Victoria, Ghalib pointedly indicated what his expectations were by mentioning that the emperors of Persia had customarily granted great wealth to their poets, giving them villages and showering them with pearls and gold.

When Macaulay spent his afternoons in his huge mansion in Calcutta marvelling over the refinements of English poetry and Latin prose, his demeanour had the swagger of the ruler. When Ghalib read the Persian classics and composed his verses in his decrepit haveli in Gali Qasim Jaan in the walled city of Delhi, his bearing, in spite of his intrinsic pride, was one of defeat. No wonder then that Macaulay could say that the reading of just one book in English, *Robinson Crusoe*, could provide all that a child needed to know about grammar and rhetoric. And Ghalib, recovering from the destruction of Delhi after the defeat of the Revolt of 1857, wrote to his disciple Tufta: 'I find both [the learning of] Avicenna and [the poetry of] Naziri to be futile. To live one's life requires just a little happiness; philosophy, empires, poetry are all nonsense . . . Both you and I are fairly good poets. Agreed that some day we might become renowned like Saadi and Hafiz. But what did they gain that we wouldn't?'[22] For Macaulay the future was replete with possibilities for the consolidation of his language and culture. For Ghalib, the future was so bleak that the achievements of the past now mattered very little. In this fundamental gap between the perspectives of two not very dissimilar people, arose the notion of doubt—the complete absence of it in one, and the growing shadow of it on the other.

Assailed by this sense of doubt, Ghalib wrote to Sir Syed Ahmed Khan questioning the very purpose of trying to resurrect their common heritage, and arguing for the need for both of them to open themselves to what the colonizing power had to offer. He was keenly aware not only of the political decline of the Mughals but also of the slow but sure displacement of Mughal culture and learning in academic institutions. In 1827, English classes had been introduced in Delhi College with a syllabus that included Goldsmith's *Traveller and Deserted*

Village, Pope's *Essay on Man*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and—in the highest grades—Shakespeare's plays, Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* and Burke's *Essays and Speeches*. When in the early 1850s Syed Ahmed Khan, who was working on an edited version of *Ain-i-Akbari*—Abul Fazl's classic on Mughal administration in Akbar's time—wrote to Ghalib asking him to contribute an introduction, the poet replied that expending energy on *Ain-i-Akbari* was a futile wallowing in the past. 'Look at the Sahibs of England,' he admonished Sir Syed Ahmed, 'they have gone far ahead of our oriental forebears. Wind and wave they have rendered useless. They are sailing their ships under fire and steam. They are creating music without the help of the mizrab [plucker]. With their magic, words fly through the air like birds. Air has been set on fire . . . Cities are being lighted without oil lamps. This new law makes all other laws obsolete. Why must you pick up straws out of old, time-swept barns while a treasure trove of pearls lies at your feet?'[23]

The shadow of self-doubt had banished all hope. For Ghalib, his heritage, of which he used to be so proud, was finally reduced to little more than straws, while the British, who now controlled his destiny, became the repositories of a 'treasure trove of pearls'. This link—between devaluing one's own past and embracing what the ruler seeks to impose—is a recurring theme of colonialism.

The developments of western science in the nineteenth century, and their application in everyday life, was something that many educated Indians admired and wanted to emulate. The learning of English was seen as a means to acquiring this new scientific learning. But the British administrators had their own, very different, reasons for imposing their language on the people of India. Their basic purpose was not to nurture Indian Einsteins of the future but to create a bank of English-knowing clerks for the immediate present. After all, had the objective been to expose the natives to scientific learning, this could have been done as easily—and more effectively—by translating Euclid and others into Sanskrit or Arabic or the vernacular languages. The projection of English as the only linguistic vehicle to science and technology had a far more pragmatic subtext. A handful of Britishers

may have conquered most of India by superior arms and chicanery, but they could not administer and control it without an inferior regiment of babus who could understand and speak their language. Lord Bentinck said so openly: he needed Indians in judicial and administrative posts in order to cut costs, because the numbers of his compatriots was limited and the salaries they demanded were higher. The Anglicists, who claimed that English alone could 'uplift' the natives, were his ideological allies, but both they and he were quite happy if the language skills of their new students remained at perfunctory levels, functional but nowhere near literary fluency. It was enough if the natives learned sufficient English to get by, so that they could, to recall again Macaulay's famous phrase, play the role of intermediaries. The policy was to wean them away from their own languages while equipping them inadequately in the colonizer's; to 'improve' them through a familiarity with a 'civilized' tongue, but to ensure that familiarity did not equal ownership or empowerment.

The success of this policy lay in gradually restricting higher job opportunities to only those who knew English. Two years after Macaulay's minute, Viceroy Auckland noted that Indians were responding well to this bait, and the realization was sinking in that without English 'success in commerce and advancement in private and in public shall become more difficult'. At the pinnacle of the colonial administrative structure were the civil services. Macaulay thought that ultimately some Indians might qualify for it, although at present there were none 'whom it would be a kindness to the Native population to place'.

Macaulay also believed that the introduction of English would dilute the religious loyalties of the natives. In a letter to his father dated 12 October 1836, he wrote: 'No Hindoo, who has received an English education, ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves as pure Deists; and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolator among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence.'[24] This was perhaps the only aspect where Macaulay was off the mark. 'Hindoos' were far more complex and clever than he thought. They were not beyond giving the impression that they held their religion in lesser esteem in order to get a job or a promotion or

admission to an English teaching institution. But very few of them actually converted to Christianity. However, there is little doubt that they became less attached to their language and less confident about their own culture and lifestyle, and this was quite in conformity with expectation. In 1825, the *Oriental Herald* had, in a piece ponderously titled 'On the Inefficiency of the Means Now in Use for the Propagation of Christianity', argued that the need of the hour was to 'wean their affections from the Persian muse, teach them to despise the barbarous splendour of their ancient princes, and totally supplanting the tastes which flourished under the Moghul reign, make them look to this country with that veneration which the youthful student feels for the classical soil of Greece'[25].

Language, thus, became a strategic tool to achieve a variety of ends, none of which had anything to do with making the natives speak English of a literary standard. In an essay he wrote in 1838—'On the Education of the People of India'—George Trevelyan was both frank and remarkably prescient. With the teaching of English, he argued, the ruled would themselves have a stake in English protection and instruction. 'The natives will not rise against us because we shall stoop to raise them,' he wrote, and if British rule ever ended, the introduction of English would enable the rulers to 'exchange profitable subjects for still more profitable allies'.[26] Not surprisingly, those who had reached the greatest proficiency in English remained the most loyal to the British in the uprising of 1857. George Campbell, a young official in India, wrote in 1853: 'The classes most advanced in English education, and who talk like newspapers, are not yet those from whom we have anything to fear.'[27]

Campbell's assessment was not wishful thinking but based on careful observation. The young, eager recruits to English-medium schools were the most easily persuaded about the superiority of western civilization. Nobinchunder Das, a student of Hooghly College at Calcutta in the 1850s, wrote in an essay:

> Those short days of Asiatic glory and superiority are gone, the stream of civilization has taken an opposite course; before it flowed from Asia to Europe, now, but with more than its pristine vigour and rapidity, it flows from Europe into Asia ... Both in

> ancient and modern times Europe has been the seat of philosophy and civilization. England ... is particularly engaged in the cause of Indian improvement. She not only carries on commerce with India, but she is ardently employed in instructing the natives in the arts and sciences, in history and political economy, and, in fact, in everything that is cultivated to elevate their understanding, ameliorate their condition, and increase their resources ... The English are to us what the Romans were to the English.[28]

Nobinchunder Das must have, no doubt, gone on to do well in his studies and probably succeeded against stiff competition to become a clerk in the British administration. Although his knowledge of English was good, to the British he must have still appeared as someone who 'talk[s] like newspapers'. People speak like newspapers when they are not speaking their own language. They learn the big words, but can rarely acquire the fluency and effortlessness of the connecting spaces, and this is noticed by those to whom the language belongs. Speaking before a Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1853, George Trevelyan exulted that the Hindus spoke purer English 'than we speak ourselves for they take it from the purest models; they speak the language of the *Spectator*, such English as is never spoken in England'.[29] Trevelyan was paying tribute less to the kind of English the Indians spoke, and more to their ability to perform like programmed fleas to the linguistic music set by the rulers. His comment reflected a sense of genuine pride in the outcome of the policy of the British that had created caricatures who spoke the language not as it was spoken in England, but in its 'purest' form, like newspapers, like the *Spectator*. It was a tribute too to the seriousness with which their subjects set themselves to learn the alien language. Macaulay was surprised to note that the students of Hindu College had learnt 'by heart the names of all the dramatists of the time of Elizabeth and James the First, dramatists of whose works they in all probability will never see a copy'.[30] More than a century later, when Nirad Choudhuri made his first trip to England in the 1950s, he was surprised that a group of Englishmen had to be told who Thomas Beckett was and what *The Black Prince* was, when he himself had 'learned about both in a jungle of East Bengal before I was twelve.'[31] The natives were nothing if not

diligent, and the British were delighted that the most diligent among them had picked up more of bookish English than they were strictly required to in order to fulfill their role as clerical intermediaries. But for all their dedication and diligence, they remained for the rulers linguistic curiosities, adept students whose incongruity was least apparent to themselves.

Not felicity, but competence, often at very basic levels, was the acquisition of the overwhelming majority of the new English-speaking Indians. A very small number could be held up for having learnt the language to some degree of eloquence. And the idea that English-language skills would filter down to the masses was not really feasible, and, in any case, was never implemented seriously. What did emerge was an English-speaking elite, largely restricted to the administrative and professional classes. Of these, the most ubiquitous was the babu, still defined in the *Webster's Dictionary* as 'A native clerk who writes English'. The Bengali writer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote caustically in 1873: 'The baboos will be indefatigable in talk, experts in a particular foreign language, and hostile to their mother tongue ... Some highly intelligent baboos will be born who will be unable to converse in their mother tongue ... Like Vishnu they will have ten incarnations, namely clerk, teacher, Brahmo, accountant, doctor, lawyer, magistrate, landlord, editor and unemployed ... Baboos will consume water at home, alcohol at friends', abuses at the prostitutes' and humiliation at the employer's.'[32]

As more and more educated Indians persevered to pick up English, it took a perceptive Englishman, Lord Curzon, who came to India as governor general in 1899, to understand what had really happened. The emphasis on rote, he observed, was the result of making English the condition for government employment. He noticed too the ensuing contempt for the vernacular languages, and deplored the decline of elementary education in the mother tongue. All this, he said, was due to the 'cold breath of Macaulay's rhetoric'. Curzon's remarks were not official British policy, of course. His concern was that of an acute and informed observer, and it was expressed as an obiter dictum, not as a resolve to reverse Macaulay's vision and the policies based on it. As an imperial power, Britain had no reason at all to question Macaulay's triumphant assertion to the British Parliament in July 1853 that his minute had indeed 'made a great revolution'.

3

MACAULAY'S LEGACY

In the decades that followed Macaulay's triumph, a small cluster of middle- and upper-middle-class Indians diligently cultivated the English language. The early members of the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 by an Englishman, A.O. Hume, were largely from this background. When they met to discuss public issues, such as the desirability of greater representation for Indians in administrative and legislative bodies, the conversation was in English, in settings reminiscent of a British drawing room. Nehru attended the Bankipore session of the Congress in 1912 and recalled: 'It was very much an English-knowing upper-class affair where morning coats and well-pressed trousers were greatly in evidence. Essentially it was a social gathering with no political excitement or tension.'[1]

Outside the 'politics' of the Congress, for those Indians who found employment in the sarkar, particularly in the slightly elevated echelons, a noticeable feature was the manner in which they tried to model themselves on their English superiors. It is once again Nehru who hits the nail on the head: 'This official and Service atmosphere invaded and set the tone for almost all Indian middle-class life, especially the English-knowing intelligentsia . . . Professional men, lawyers, doctors and others succumbed to it. All these people lived in a world apart, cut off from the masses and even the lower middle class.'[2] As always, the

emulation of the British was accompanied by a denigration of what was one's own. Nehru wrote that even in a relatively small city like Allahabad, his father, Motilal, 'was attracted to western dress and other western ways at a time when it was uncommon for Indians to take to them except in big cities like Calcutta and Bombay . . . He had a feeling that his countrymen had fallen low and almost deserved what they got . . . He looked to the west and felt greatly attracted by western progress, and thought that this would come through an association with England.'[3]

The advent of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi gave to India's freedom movement a more radical agenda and a mass following. Nehru became his devoted lieutenant, and with his leftist leanings sought to steer the nationalist upsurge towards structural change in favour of the urban poor and the peasantry. The more pragmatic Gandhi was often a check on Nehru's revolutionary zeal, but both of them were in complete agreement on the role of English in the free India for which they were working. In a remarkably strong and reasoned statement Gandhi spoke his mind as early as 1921:

> It is my considered opinion that English education in the manner it has been given has emasculated the English-educated Indians, it has put a severe strain upon the Indian students' nervous energy, and has made of us imitators. The process of displacing the vernacular has been one of the saddest chapters in the British connection. Ram Mohan Rai would have been a greater reformer and Lokmanya Tilak would have been a greater scholar, if they had not to start with the handicap of having to think in English and transmit their thoughts chiefly in English . . . No doubt they both gained from their knowledge of the rich treasures of English literature. But these should have been accessible to them through their own vernaculars. No country can become a nation by producing a race of translators. Think of what would have happened to the English if they had not an authorized version of the Bible. I do believe that Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, Guru Govind Singh, Shivaji and Pratap were greater men than Ram Mohan Rai and Tilak . . . I refuse to believe that the Raja and the Lokmanya could not have thought the thoughts they did without a knowledge

of the English language. Of all the superstitions that affect India, none is so great as that a knowledge of the English language is necessary for imbibing ideas of liberty and developing accuracy of thought. It should be remembered that there has been only one system of education before the country for the past fifty years, and only one medium of expression forced on the country. We have, therefore, no data before us as to what we would have been but for the education in the existing schools and colleges. This, however, we know, that India is poorer than fifty years ago . . . The system of education is its most defective part. It was conceived and born in error, for the English rulers honestly believed the indigenous system to be worse than useless. It has been nurtured in sin, for the tendency has been to dwarf the Indian body, mind, and soul.[4]

Gandhi's views did not change, for, in 1944, just a few years before Independence, he spoke in a similar vein, but this time with a sense of foreboding about the consequences for the future: 'Our love of the English language in preference to our own mother tongue has caused a deep chasm between the educated and the politically minded classes and the masses. We flounder when we make the vain attempt to express abstruse thoughts in the mother tongue . . . The result has been disastrous . . . We are too near our own times correctly to measure the disservice caused to India by the neglect of its great languages.'[5] Nehru was, if anything, as emphatic: 'Some people imagine that English is likely to become the lingua franca of India. That seems to me a fantastic conception, except in respect of a handful of upper-class intelligentsia. It has no relation to the problem of mass education and culture. It may be . . . that English will become increasingly a language used for technical, scientific and business communications, and especially for international contacts . . . but if we are to have a balanced view of the world we must not confine ourselves to English spectacles.'[6] And, even though as a result of many years at Eton and Cambridge, English had become Nehru's first language, he was perceptive enough to note why this had happened. 'The British had created,' he wrote in his autobiography, 'a new caste or class in India, the English-educated class, which lived in a world of its own, cut off from the mass of the population . . .'

But in spite of such strong views, both Gandhi and Nehru were defeated by Macaulay's legacy. As early as 1925, the Congress had adopted a resolution that its proceedings shall be conducted as far as possible in Hindustani. But, given the linguistic predilections of the pan-Indian leadership of the freedom movement, little progress was made in the implementation of the resolution and English remained the official language of the Congress. In fact, the dependence on English of those who were at the forefront of the freedom movement only grew over the years. This was partly understandable, because their interlocutors were the British, and the memorandums and petitions had to be in English. But it is significant that Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy in India, thought that they often came across as even more British than the British. Delivering the second Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture in 1968, Mountbatten reminisced: 'They were all professional lawyers steeped in the law and especially in British constitutional law. In this respect they were almost more British than the British. They were all masters of the English language, indeed of a clearer and purer prose than many of our British politicians. It was not only Churchill who carried on the traditions of Gibbon and Macaulay. The classical polish of Nehru's written and spoken word was truly memorable.'[7]

And so it was, that at the stroke of the midnight hour on the night of 14 August 1947, when India finally broke the chains of British bondage, Nehru's first words to the millions across the country waiting with bated breath to hear one of the most towering leaders of the freedom movement, were in English. 'Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny,' he said. 'And now the time has come to redeem that pledge . . .' He spoke with eloquence and passion and a transparent sense of destiny. But, unfortunately, only a minuscule elite could understand what he was saying. Even the intermediaries created as a result of Macaulay's policy could not really be trusted to understand or spell 'tryst' correctly. It was truly an ironic situation: an Indian leader choosing to speak to his own people at the very moment of freedom not in his own language but in that of the ruler, fully aware that most of his compatriots would not understand what he was saying, and yet, nobody—not those who listened without understanding, nor those who listened but understood only partially

because their comprehension was limited to their clerical knowledge of English, nor the handful who, like Nehru, could speak the language with fluency and felicity—thought this to be unusual. Had Nehru spoken in Hindi, large numbers in the southern or eastern or some other parts of India may still not have understood all that he would have said. But at least the language would have been of the soil, of a country they could now truly call free and their own, rather than the language of the very conquerors whose departure they were celebrating—a language whose idiom and emotional quotient could hardly touch them.

~

To be fair, the Constituent Assembly that met in 1946 to draft a Constitution for free India understood the importance of a national language for a newly independent nation that had been held in servitude for close to 200 years. But, once again, the legacy of Macaulay was not easy to overcome. Dr Rajendra Prasad, the Chairman of the Assembly, himself acknowledged this: 'Whatever our sentiments may dictate, we have to recognize the fact that most of those who have been concerned with the drafting of the Constitution can express themselves better in English than in Hindi.'[8] After interminable drafts and discussions, a compromise was arrived at. Hindi in the Devanagari script was to be the official language of the Union. However, English would continue for a period of fifteen years to be used for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before the adoption of the Constitution, and if need be its lease of life could be further extended beyond the period of fifteen years through Parliamentary legislation.

The intention of the Constitution-makers was crystal clear: English was to be progressively phased out to make way for Hindi as the national language. Article 351 laid out the policy guidelines framework through which this was to be achieved: 'It shall be the duty of the Union to promote the spread of the Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its environment by assimilating, without interfering with its genius, the forms, styles and expressions

used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eighth Schedule, and by drawing, wherever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit and secondarily on other languages.'

The charge against the English-knowing members of the middle class in the higher echelons of the Union administration and in the states, and their supporters in the professions, the armed forces, and in the corporate world, was that they had no intention of seriously implementing the stipulations of the Constitution. As so presciently predicted by Macaulay, they had become used to English as the language of usage; for many of them English had replaced even their mother tongue. In Nehru, whose first language was English (and he had the honesty to admit this), they had a powerful patron. The result was that many of the policy measures that could have been taken to facilitate the acceptance of a national language in the early years after 1947, when patriotism was high and memories of the freedom struggle still vivid, were either ignored or implemented indifferently. The violent protests that erupted in the mid-1960s, most vociferously in the southern state of Tamil Nadu (where the majority was Tamil speaking), against the imposition of Hindi, could perhaps have been pre-empted by a more persistent and imaginative handling at the very outset. The cynical could even argue that the hardening of positions between those for and against Hindi was a rather convenient development for the small but powerful group that had always remained unconvinced of the need to replace English.

It is true that the often excessive zeal of the propagandists of Hindi alienated many of their fellow citizens whose mother tongue was not Hindi and made the implementation of the language policy difficult. But it is also true that influential bureaucrats, in collusion with their mentors in politics, did little to counter the chauvinisms on both sides of the divide through resolute policy initiatives. There was little incentive for those who had been trained to dispose of their files in English, and whose knowledge of Hindi was minimal or inadequate, to devote time to the implementation of Article 351, or dwell overtime on the formulation of a three-language formula, or ensure the allocation and optimum utilization of grants for the teaching of Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking states. The one point on which the proponents of English were united was that Hindi was being made into an

unspeakably difficult language by the 'narrow-minded' experts entrusted with its development. The criticism was partially valid, but for the wrong reasons. The motivation behind the plea for Hindustani, made forcefully and pertinently by people like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was not to maim the development of Hindi, but to enrich both Hindi and Urdu through the retention of a language which had become the lingua franca of the common man, especially in large parts of northern India. However, the essential sentiment of the English-speaking upper middle class was not for an enriched blend of these languages but for an anaemic by-product which could be easily understood by *them*.

To make Hindi 'simple', and not to creatively extend its reach and enrich its texture, was the simplistic demand of the entrenched elite. The humiliation inherent in such an approach for a newly independent nation, proud of its culture and heritage, was largely unfelt by them. What would be the reaction in England—and indeed of Macaulay, were he around—if an influential lobby seriously argued for the deliberate pauperization of the English language! Hindi is a language with centuries of evolution and a sophisticated and extensive vocabulary. It could not be crippled or retarded simply to make it more comprehensible to those who had developed a greater facility in English. The same was true for the other great languages of India, whose development was also held to ransom by the preference for English of the ruling elite in the different states of the Union. None of this, of course, was of much concern to the self-assured world of the English-speaking classes. For these successful progeny of Macaulay, there was little reason to displace a language which provided them effortless social standing, access to the best educational institutions and the best jobs.

It is important to emphasize that this is not a diatribe against the English language. English has for historical reasons become a language spoken by a great many people in the world. It is an indispensable tool to interface with a globalizing world. Moreover, as a language, it has a beauty and dexterity of its own. Languages by themselves are not guilty of cultural domination, their usage is. For Indians it is relevant to introspect on what the imposition of English has meant to them, as a people, a society and a nation. Even as more and more Indians queue

up to learn English, we are witness to the most unacceptable linguistic shoddiness in a nation with an inestimably rich linguistic tradition. Anyone who sees the quality of English prose in government files will be left with no doubt about the truth of this assertion. English-medium schools may proliferate, but the entire country is dotted with examples of the shockingly inadequate grasp of the language. Spellings are an approximation: 'danting' for denting, 'panting' for painting, 'break' for brake, 'nodels' for noodles. Grammatical mistakes abound: smart young airline stewards and hostesses will invariably 'look forward to serve you again'; every second overworked person will complain about 'so much of work to do'; few people 'will let you know' instead of 'would let you know'. Syntax, too, is mostly wrong, and pronunciation is often ridiculous.

Those who think they know the language speak it in a typically over-adjectivized and stilted manner. Former prime minister Vajpayee is reported to have once quipped that the British finally left India not because of the freedom movement but because they could not bear any more the massacre of the English language! Even the best English-language newspapers have routine mistakes of spelling and grammar, and except for columns by a handful of people who have an enviable command of the language, the rest of the writing is wearisome in its mediocrity. The comparison with the newspapers in England is stark. The effortless literary felicity in evidence there should have prompted most Indian newspapers to opt out of English long ago.

The interesting thing is that newspapers in Hindi do not make such mistakes. This is also true of the leading newspapers in Malayalam, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi and all other Indian languages. And yet, the pan-Indian elite rarely read these publications. For them, those who read the news in their native language are inferior to those who read it in English. It is a clear class divide: those in the higher echelons subscribe to and read English newspapers, and those below them take the non-English papers. I used to once write a syndicated column; the people whom I met socially in the evenings had read the column in English; my driver and other staff talked to me about the version in Hindi.

The truth is that English has become a language of social exclusion: the upper crust of the Indian middle class presides over this linguistic

apartheid; the rest of India consists of victims and aspirants. The ability to speak with the right accent and fluency and pronunciation has become the touchstone for entry into the charmed circle of the ruling elite. It is the criterion for social acceptance. Those who can speak it are People Like Us. Those who cannot are the others, the 'natives', bereft of the qualifying social and educational background. Almost every Hindi film star gives interviews in English. Even our phenomenally talented small-town cricket stars never really 'arrive'—no matter how many runs they have scored or how many wickets they have taken—till they can give interviews in English and understand the Australians and Scots and South Africans who will fire questions at them after the match.

Not surprisingly, a great many in the middle class consider it a matter of pride if their children are poor in Hindi or their mother tongue. It is not unusual to find mothers discussing with a false note of deprecation—tinged with pride—the poor record their children have in their mother tongue. Ashok Vajpeyi, the well-known Hindi poet, once told me that his neighbours in his middle-class residential colony once complimented him on his little grandson's proficiency in Hindi. 'I thanked them,' he said, 'but I wondered what had happened to us Indians if we needed to be complimented for being able to speak our own language with fluency.' The children and grandchildren of his neighbours were better in English; his grandson was the only child who spoke his own language so effortlessly. Even Macaulay would have been surprised if he were to see the kind of complex Indians have developed about their mother tongues.

The proponents of English make the claim that the language is now Indian: more people speak it in India than even in England. Professor David Crystal, who has authored the *Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language*, makes this point explicitly. 'In language, numbers count,' he said while speaking in India in 2008. 'There are more people speaking English in India than in the rest of the native-English-speaking world.' It is true, perhaps, that purely in numerical terms a great many Indians know something of the language, but the total number of those who do so with any degree of adequacy is certainly less than five per cent of the population. Five per cent of over a billion people is still a very large figure. But Professor Crystal is quick to

clarify that these large numbers of Indians speak only a 'dialect' of English, easily distinguished from 'Standard English'. The numerical argument is in reality, therefore, a not-so-subtle attempt by those to whom the language originally belongs to perpetuate its hegemony. The argument of the neo-linguistic imperialists runs something like this: We took away your languages and imposed our own; you cannot speak and write it like us, but even if you do so badly, your mutant of our language is still something for you to be proud of, and we are willing to legitimize it and count you among the growing number of English speakers of the world, and nothing pleases us more than when you yourself agree with us. It is pertinent that this logic is never applied to countries like Spain or Russia or Italy or France, where too there are many more people today, than at any other time in their history, who know English. The peoples of these countries are too proud of their own language, and know it well enough, to be condescendingly included in the English-speaking world. But typically, and as one of the most easily verifiable consequences of colonialism, some Indians themselves take pride in saying that English is an Indian language. Or else they argue that its pidgin derivative will do as well because it serves the purpose of communication. A nation that hopes to take its place on the high table of the most powerful nations of the world can hardly afford to hobble into the twenty-first century on the crutches of Hinglish.

The Kenyan Nobel Laureate Professor Wangari Mathai once told me that it was only the colonial rulers who truly understood the importance of a language. That is why it was the first thing they took away from us. Tragically, the victims are the last to know what they have lost. On 21 December 2004, I was present at an important function to mark the golden anniversary of the Sahitya Akademi, India's highest literary body, created by Jawaharlal Nehru to promote and reward creative writing in the Indian languages. A postal stamp, quite ingeniously designed, showing the first alphabet of all the country's languages, was to be issued by the junior minister of communications, Shakeel Ahmed, and handed over to the cabinet minister for culture, Jaipal Reddy. Satchidanandan, the secretary of the Akademi, who is a sensitive poet and a writer of eminence in Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala, from where he hails, began the proceedings in English. Shakeel

Ahmed, who is from Bihar, read out a soulless speech in English, mispronouncing a great many words. Jaipal Reddy, one of the few cerebral politicians in the country, made an intelligent speech, but in English. Sunil Gangopadhyaya, a major writer in Bengali, and the vice president of the Akademi, also spoke in English. The only person who spoke in an Indian language, Urdu, was Gopichand Narang, the president of the Akademi. Sharon Lowen, an American citizen who is one of India's acclaimed classical dancers, was to give a performance after the speeches. Her brochure was in English. The invitation to a select few to join the ministers over a cup of tea was in English. The lettering on the newly issued stamp was in English. The audience consisted largely of writers in the languages of India, little known and down at heel, condemned to obscurity in a nation that lionizes only the few who write in English. Many of the speakers stressed the need to celebrate and resurrect notable writers in the Indian languages. They made the appeal in English.

The truth is that whatever illusions people may have or are encouraged to have, English can never be an *Indian* language. In James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Daedalus expresses the anguish of an Irishman at having to speak English: 'The language in which we are speaking is his [the Englishman's] before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.' There must be very few laments which so evocatively sum up the pain of trying to, or being condemned to, speak someone else's language in preference to one's own. Why don't Indians feel this pain? The answer is again a tribute to the genius of Macaulay. The class of intermediaries he created were programmed to lose respect for their own tongue, even if their grasp of the foreign language remained at best rudimentary. A clutch of Indian authors writing in English have deservedly won international acclaim. But, for the greatest part, Yeats's observation in a letter of 1835 remains essentially true. 'Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English,' he wrote. 'Nobody can write English with music and style in a language not learned in childhood

and ever sing the language of his thoughts.' V.S. Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness* said much the same thing. Calling English 'the greatest incongruity of British rule', he added that a clerk in India using English in a government office is 'immediately stultified', since he can never fully grasp the nuances of the foreign language, 'which limits his response and makes him inflexible'.[9] The important thing is to make the distinction between learning a language and claiming it as your own. Many Indians begin to learn English when still very young, their as yet unformed tongues grappling with 'Ba Ba Black Sheep' and 'Humpty Dumpty' in mostly shoddy 'English-medium schools'. But this is not the language in which they can sing their thoughts and their deepest feelings.

The stultification that the foreign language imposes is not restricted only to the behaviour of clerks. It is an all-pervasive phenomenon, casting a baneful shadow on the most refined areas of artistic expression. I recall in London at the Nehru Centre a performance by the well-known Odissi exponent Guru Gangadhar Pradhan and his group. He was seated on the stage playing the pakhawaj. A vocalist sang beautifully the works of Oriya poets in compositions based on classical ragas. The dancers, resplendent in their finely pleated gold-thread saris and delicate make-up, were completely in step. Their traditional jewellery was in place and their facial expressions in harmony. The male dancer, bare-bodied, with kundals in his ears, did not look at all out of place. The beat of the pakhawaj was in perfect rhythm with the ghungroos on the dancer's feet as the theme of Krishna and Radha's eternal love-play unfolded. It was an authentic moment in sync with tradition, heritage, milieu, training, mythology and folklore, making complete sense to the participants, emanating from the soil and from the sap that goes into the making of culture, where expression is as effortless as a child falling off to sleep in a mother's clasp. The only jarring thing was the commentary by one of the dancers in English. It was an English that sounded like Oriya, full of big words, laboured and hardly comprehensible. The speaker was self-conscious, unsure, in such striking contrast to the sure-footedness of her dance. Guru Gangadhar seemed to be abashed by his awkwardness in the English language, bowing and smiling a little more than what would be the natural self-effacement of a great artist. In those awkward moments he

was a very different person to the confident artist playing dexterously on the pakhawaj, calling out the complex beat in perfect sync with the vocalist, the sitar player, the violinist and the dancers.

I have noticed the same thing in the proliferating FM channels in India. Anchors who speak in Hindi or other Indian languages are far more relaxed, deft and sure-footed, flowing with the language, breaking a word to prove a point, bending a proverb, playing effortlessly with the language, their humour full of an earthiness that comes naturally and creates an immediate resonance with listeners. On Red FM when I hear 'Khurafati' Nitin play the fool with an unsuspecting listener, or devise a jingle, or crack a joke which is funny because the context is familiar both to the language and—perhaps for that reason alone—to the lives of ordinary people, I marvel at how language can play such a transforming and liberating role. None of this is evident in the English-language programmes, though the anchors are often good. There's always something unfinished and a little forced or 'clubby' about the anecdotes they tell and the jokes they crack.

An evening spent with Kapil Dev also brought home this point dramatically. Kapil enjoys an iconic stature as a world-class cricketer of yesteryears, but his fluency in English is poor. Renuka and I met him and his wife some years ago at an elegant dinner at the home of one of the richest Indians in England, the Narulas. A few more Indian guests were present, and the conversation—as is the norm for India's social elite—was mostly in English. Kapil sat silently, replying in monosyllables when spoken to. But then somebody narrated a joke in Punjabi, and Kapil underwent a remarkable transformation. The earlier reticence evaporated, and he literally came into his own. Freed from the fetters of the foreign language, he relaxed visibly. It was as if he had entered a comfort zone in which he could be himself without the burden of a language which, even if he knew it better, would remain a barrier. He was now a part of the conversation with an effortlessness and a sparkle that was a pleasure to hear. Throughout the evening he kept the entire gathering in splits, narrating one joke after another, mimicking well-known Indian film actors and politicians, his Punjabi full of colloquialisms and robust wisdom and humour.

It is true that over the years the reach of Hindi and some other Indian languages has grown considerably. The largest circulating daily

today, *Dainik Bhaskar*, is in Hindi, and five more Hindi papers figure in the list of the top ten daily newspapers by circulation. *Malayala Manorama* in Kerala and *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in West Bengal, along with some Marathi and Gujarati papers, also sell in very large numbers. The television news channel with the largest viewership, Aaj Tak, is in Hindi, and even Murdoch's Star News, which planned to come in as an English news channel, decided to switch to Hindi. However, it is a matter of concern that many Indian-language newspapers and television channels have noticeably switched to Hinglish. According to one survey, almost 70 per cent of words in Zee TV's Hindi news are in English! It isn't unusual to hear anchors and experts on news shows speak sentences like this: 'India ko apni strategic priorities aur ambitions ke context mein neighbouring countries se negotiations karni hongi.' Not a single word of consequence in this sentence is in Hindi. Exactly whom is this news meant for? Those who understand the English phrases don't need the few Hindi link words, and those who don't will not know what the learned person has said. This is mindless mongrelization; it enriches neither language; indeed, it serves no purpose at all.

Neelabh Mishra, who edits the Hindi edition of *Outlook* magazine, rightly argues that 'while no one should grudge creative borrowing of vocabulary and terminology from other languages for new conceptual categories, one can't ignore the fact that the Hindi used in newspapers suffers from the dead weight of indiscriminate borrowing from English that obfuscates information and experience . . . In the news media, the world of Hindi is qualitatively shrinking, even though it has been quantitatively expanding by leaps and bounds in terms of circulation and revenue.' Neelabh makes the further point that Hindi is at a discount even in Bollywood, which has done the most to promote it:

> The awkwardness with Hindi of most Bollywood celebrities, even north Indian ones, is obvious when one hears them off screen, sometimes even on screen; it is reflected in an anglicized accent here or an odd, literally translated turn of phrase there. Here's an industry at great discomfort with the medium it lives off. Hindi films are mostly plotted and scripted in English, the dialogues

written in Roman script, the films are marketed in English and the exchange of ideas within the industry is mostly in English. While this may have given the Hindi film industry a cosmopolitan edge, it also points to a crisis that Hindi is facing: it is handing over the reins of conception, execution and control of even its most popular projects to people who are uncomfortable with the language. When a language cedes control of itself, it cedes power—and, in doing so, betrays a deep-seated lack of confidence in its own creativity.[10]

Moreover, not all the expanding reach of the media in Hindi and the other indigenous languages has affected the loyalty of the elite to English, and even more importantly, it hasn't corrected the sense of *inferiority* still attached to knowing our own languages better than we know English. Every time I travel by the Shatabdi train to Chandigarh I try this experiment: I ask someone a question in Hindi and—expectedly enough—the answer is in English, just in case I thought the person asked does not know English. Advertisements may pour into the Hindi television channels and newspapers, but commercial returns cannot be a compensation for the lack of respect still greatly evident for our own tongues. Bookshelves in most middle-class homes in cities have only English titles. Only English newspapers are available on Indian domestic and international airlines; even in Pakistan, Urdu papers are available on flights, and I have noticed that a great many passengers prefer them to those in English. Henry Chu, the South Asia Bureau Chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, once asked me with genuine perplexity why the fancy visitor's room in the office of Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of India's Planning Commission, had only newspapers in English. 'Isn't that a bit odd?' he asked me. 'Does Mr Ahluwalia not know any Indian language?' Chu was still new to India, but he must have found out soon enough that for the anglicized elite and its emulators there is nothing odd in this situation. There is no national magazine in Hindi which can compete with *India Today* or *Outlook*, and it is in itself a sad commentary that the Hindi versions of these publications are called *India Today* and *Outlook*. Recently the *Indian Express* published a list of the top ten opinion makers in the country; all of them write in English.[11] It was as though the thinkers

and columnists who write in the several Indian languages didn't matter at all in a survey of the country's finest minds.

The Hindi book publishing industry is dismal, too. Hardly any book in Hindi acquires a pan-Indian readership, and even the successful ones are not read by the elite. The sale of books in the Indian languages is a disgrace. Unprofessional editors continue to publish titles whose sales are minimal and depend on government purchases or other institutional buyers. The production and editing leaves much to be desired, and the publishers appear to be committed democrats because they do not believe in royalties. If a book sells 1000 copies the publisher considers it a bestseller, and there is a great deal of vanity publishing. Sitakant Mahapatra, the soft-spoken poet from Orissa, who won the country's highest literary award, the Bharatiya Jnanpith, told me that his volume of poems in Oriya sold less than 800 copies in Orissa and is now out of print! If we look at the book industry in other countries, the contrast is dramatic. In the United Kingdom, books sell tens of thousands of copies. Every major newspaper has a voluminous weekly section on books. The same is true of the United States, France, Spain or Japan. Yes, these countries are affluent, but books sell in large numbers not only because of greater purchasing power. I recall that in Russia, at a time when the country was in the middle of a difficult transition after the break-up of the Soviet Union and ordinary people did not get their salaries for months, a new edition of Pushkin sold in the hundreds of thousands. If Russia was in thrall to a foreign language, as indeed was the case at one time when the elite preferred to speak French rather than Russian, this would never happen.

When nations do not accord their own languages the respect that is their due, they are guilty also of destroying a literary heritage developed over millennia. Sheldon Pollock, who is the Ransford Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Columbia University in New York, and has also edited the Clay Sanskrit Library, wrote recently that 'the house of Indian classical language study is not only burning, it lies almost in ashes'.[12] Pollock makes the point that until 1947 and for centuries before that, India had scholars in philology who compared with the best in the world. These scholars produced pioneering works in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, Bangla, Brajbhasha, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, Persian, Prakrit, Sanskrit and Urdu that were

invaluable reference works and constituted a window to the roots of our culture. Unfortunately, the last few decades have seen almost no work on this literary treasure, so much so that foreign universities—and Pollock cites the case of an important one in the US which failed to get a trained professor in Telugu who had a command over the entire classical Telugu tradition—are being forced to close down their specialities in our languages. 'Today, in neither of the two great universities in the capital city of India,' laments Pollock, 'is anyone conducting research on classical Hindi literature, the great works of Keshavdas and his successors. Imagine—and this is an exact parallel—if there was no one in Paris in 2008 producing scholarship on the works of Cornielle, Racine and Moliere. Not coincidentally, a vast number of Brajbhasha texts lie mouldering in archives, unedited to this day. This is even truer of Indo-Persian literature. Large quantities of manuscripts, including *divans* of some of the great court poets of Mughal India, remain unpublished and unread.'[13]

All Indians need to seriously introspect: where are we in relation to our own languages? We need to do this in our own interest, because citizens of a great nation cannot afford to appear like linguistic photocopies or caricatures. Photocopies are a convenience for the benefit of others. To win respect we need to be rooted in our own cultural milieu, and language is an indispensable element in this effort. At present we are fast becoming a nation of linguistic half-castes, who can never speak English as their first language, but who are adrift from their mother tongue and unsure in the official language. To remedy the situation we need a radically new approach to the teaching of languages. It is essential that children are taught only in their mother tongue and simultaneously learn Hindi up to grade six. This will give them the necessary grounding in their own milieu, their own folklore, mythology and literature, and help them develop a love and respect for their own immensely rich linguistic heritage. It will also ensure that instead of memorizing and learning by rote—as inevitably happens when students are instructed in a language that doesn't come naturally to them—our students will learn to think and debate. Those students for whom Hindi is the mother tongue should learn at least one more Indian language. Today, for instance, we have a situation where many of the educated have never read Kalidasa or Thiruvallur but are familiar with Shakespeare. Shakespeare is undoubtedly a great writer, but think of a situation in Britain where Englishmen take pride in knowing Kalidasa but have never read Shakespeare! The analogy appears to be farcical, until we pause for a moment and realize that this indeed is the situation, in great measure, in our country.

English must be taught, but it must be introduced after the sixth grade, by when children have become fluent in their own languages. The elite Sardar Patel Vidyalaya in New Delhi follows this pattern very successfully, so it is possible. Such a linguistic curriculum will still allow Indians to be competitive in the IT markets, and equip them to interface with a globalizing world. In fact, there is a theory that those who are fluent first in their own language pick up a foreign one faster. There is no inherent contradiction between being rooted in one's own linguistic heritage and also knowing enough English to cope with international transactions. Knowledge of English is a utility; it is an asset in a competitive job market, and opens up new avenues of employment. When Chandrabhan Prasad, the ebullient Dalit thinker, emphasizes that English is a tool of empowerment he is not entirely wrong. The argument here, however, is not against the teaching of English, but in favour of striking the right balance between acquiring a working proficiency in the foreign language *and* according respect, acceptability and pride of place to one's own languages.

The brilliant Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who begins his book *Decolonizing the Mind* with the statement that this will be his last book in English, and henceforth he will write only in Giyuku and Kishwahili, makes the basic point that every language 'has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and in Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British . . . it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history.'[14] We urgently need to understand this difference, the difference between a language of communication and a language which is the carrier of culture, and to realize further that the language of communication cannot develop at the cost of the carrier of our culture.

It is demeaning to advance the logic that the thousands of young

Indians staying awake all night mimicking American and British accents in call centres across the country can do their job well only if they make a mockery of their linguistic inheritance. Call centres provide much-needed jobs, but their existence is less a proof of the revolution in IT that India is capable of and more an indication of the fact that a large number of our educated youth are branded as 'IT coolies'. One of the first things that recruits to call centres learn is how to remove the MTI (Mother Tongue Interference) and RI (Regional Interference) in their speech. They spend weeks at 'training' centres acquiring a Yankee twang or picking up British slang, learning to say 'Good moarning' to American customers and 'Hai Maite' to Australian ones. The 'training' includes a deliberate programme of de-culturalization: someone called Sumati is encouraged to become Suzanne and create an American family history which makes her a resident of Columbia, Maryland, with a twenty-two-year-old younger sister called Becky.[15] This conscious dislocation is considered a good way to destroy or dilute the pernicious hold of mother tongues. But 'a mother tongue is not just a verbal pile. It is a psychology, an environment, a source of cultural and cognitive sustenance, an emotion, a bond, and many collateral things. To attempt to guard against its "interference" is an act of violence with a potential to damage some vital nerves of the emotional–cultural–artistic continuum of a learner's personality.'[16] The economic incentive to impose English was used by the British in the nineteenth century: those who knew English had a better chance of becoming clerks in the colonial bureaucracy. It is astonishing that it is being purveyed again to suit the so-called compulsions of a globalizing world—despite the fact that this time round we have a choice.

The challenge before all Indians is this: either we re-appropriate our linguistic cultural space, or continue to be linguistic caricatures. We do not realize the extent to which we have indeed become the latter, unless we begin to grasp how foreigners see us. I can never forget what a Russian woman, who had enjoyed reading my book on the Indian middle class, said to me: 'Mr Varma, I greatly enjoyed reading your book. Do you also write in English?' Her assumption—and a very valid one—was that coming from a country with over twenty languages that go back thousands of years, I must have written

in my own language, and that what she had read was an English translation. On 10 May 2007, in the august Central Hall of Parliament, a commemoration event was held to mark the 150th anniversary of the first uprising against the British. The speaker of the Lok Sabha spoke in English; the then vice president of India—whose Hindi is excellent—spoke in English; the prime minister spoke in English; only the President of India at the time, whose mother tongue is Tamil, began his speech in Hindi to spontaneous applause. Later he too switched to English. Macaulay must have congratulated himself in his grave, hearing free India's highest dignitaries speak of our first war of independence in the imperialist's language, a language few of them had mastered but which they would still privilege over their own, though they would probably use the latter with far greater confidence and proficiency. Pamela Philipose, one of the country's most talented columnists, wrote a wonderfully sarcastic piece in the *Indian Express* (30 May 2007):

> Lads and Ladis, let us be celebrating our first war of independence by hailing with our hankies our heroes and hero-ranis . . . Arrey bhai, the battle is carrying on even as I am speaking, be marking my words. Each bandha in our Bharat Mata is, aise waise, fighting the English pepuls by doing to death their national language . . . Arrey, if you are coming to be thinking about it, we are all Mangal Pandeys, hitting hardly on the darwaza of the maharani's bhasha every-shevery day of our living lives, every-shevery time we are saying or writing even one word only, we are fighting the angrez. You are not understanding, no? Kindly be taking a seat while I am explaining this for your better sense . . . We are independent minded and are speaking English like we are speaking Hindi-Vindi, Tamil-Shamil, and all. Let me be putting it nicely in a poetical way, we are moulding angrezi and scolding it, we are mangling it and strangling it, undermining it and over-mining it.

Language is a symbol of a people's identity. It is the most vital part of their culture. A people must be proud of their language, and not speak it by default or with diffidence. This is the hallmark of nations who can earn the respect of others. The French, the Germans, the Spanish, the Russians, the Chinese and the Japanese are doing quite well economically without needing to sacrifice or neglect or belittle

their own languages in preference to English. The Italian town of San Remo is literally a few minutes away from Menton, the last French town on the Riviera. But the moment you cross the border into Italy, the language changes. People prefer to speak only in Italian; the signage is only in Italian; there is a perceptible difference in culture and lifestyle too. This is evident also on the other side of the south of France when you cross into Spain. Nobody seems to speak French the moment you cross the barrier high up in the Pyrenees. The language changes ubiquitously to Spanish.

Boyd Tonkin, the erudite books editor of the *Independent*, met me in Delhi some years ago. He had come to attend the Indo-UK Kitab Festival, where largely Indians writing in English had congregated. He agreed with me that the neglect of Indian languages is obvious. The question is, what can be done. There are very few good translators from the original into English, and even when they are found, there are few publishers willing to publish the translation. The result is that good writers in the Indian languages languish, and bad writers in English proliferate. For every one Vikram Seth there are thousands who aspire to become authors in English, and actually believe that the rubbish they churn out entitles them to claim English as their first language. Boyd mentioned that at the time of the Roman Empire, Latin had become a kind of lingua franca for a huge area stretching from Britain to Egypt. But nations in Europe, he added, are extremely attached to their languages. They associate their language with their culture, and look upon it as their calling card, a mark of their unique identity. English is understood and spoken by an increasing number of Europeans, but the gain for English is not at the cost of the primary language. It is an additional resource, a convenience, a means to facilitate international communication. If countries that are seeking to demolish barriers between them through the common membership of the EU can still retain and nurture their languages with both passion and pride, why are we so willing to relinquish our own and adopt another?

Examples of the invidious manner in which knowledge of English has become a tool for social exclusion proliferate in our daily lives. I will quote but one recent example. Sunil Kumar, a young student at the London School of Economics, came to see me. His family comes

from Bihar, but he has been educated in England, and his parents now live in California. Sunil likes to dress in an Indian way, especially in London, where his favourite outfit is a kurta over his jeans, combining both what he has borrowed and what is his own. For someone who has stayed outside for so long, he also speaks surprisingly good Hindi. He narrated what happened to him on a recent visit to Delhi: 'I had gone to a bookshop, and then thought I'd have a coffee at Barista, the trendy coffee-shop chain, next door. I was wearing a kurta over my jeans, and the hostess at the door spoke to me in Hindi: "Kahan ja rahe ho? Idhar coffee bohat mehngi hai." (Where do you think you're going? The coffee is very expensive here.) I asked her, in Hindi, how expensive it was. She said: "Baavan rupees ka ek cup." (Fifty-two rupees a cup.) I then asked her in English: "How much is baavan?" She paused, and noticing the way I spoke English, and noticing too that I was anglicized enough not even to know the Hindi numerical, her whole demeanour changed. Replacing her dour expression with a smile, she welcomed me in.' Sunil managed to gain entry to the Barista (where, incidentally, as in every such outlet across India, the shop sign, the menu and the notice outside the toilets are all in English). But I wonder what humiliation a similarly dressed man might have been subjected to if he hadn't the right English with which to humble and shame the lady guarding the entrance.

The resolve to give our own languages the respect that is their due is part of the unfinished agenda of Independence. This revival must take place volitionally, at the level of mass realization, with the government making the requisite policy changes. Once we understand that language is an inextricable part of nationhood, and that nations that do not understand this are devaluing their sovereignty, the rest will fall into place. The issue then will not be about the *imposition* of Hindi or the rejection of English. It will be about the use of English as an international language but not at the cost of the development and primacy of our own languages. The late Nirmal Verma rightly made the point that a beginning must be made in the proceedings of Parliament, the most visible and the highest forum of our democratic polity and nationhood. There is no reason, he argued, why our MPs cannot speak in any of the recognized Indian languages of the Constitution, with translations into Hindi, which is the official language

of the Union and was envisaged by our founders as the national language. If it is argued that not everybody knows Hindi, it could as well be argued, he said, that not everyone knows English.[17]

Once changes of this nature begin to take place, there will be no place for the linguistic chauvinisms of the past. The British projected India as a place of linguistic chaos, a Tower of Babel to beat all such towers. The argument that English must replace the Indian languages was theirs, not ours. As one of them put it, 'The Indian mind had walled itself up inside such a prison that only a new language could give it a ladder of escape.'[18] They missed, deliberately, the fundamental point that almost all the Indian languages have an underlying unity because they are based on Sanskrit and that the decision to impose English was a colonial project devised by Macaulay and the Anglicists in opposition to the Orientalists who were an influential group among the rulers themselves. Moreover, in the last few decades the acceptance of Hindi has made incremental progress across the country, and thanks to the popularity of Hindi films and national television, it is now spoken and understood by over forty per cent of Indians. Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, a state which was the most vociferous in its protest against Hindi fifty years ago, has today the country's largest number of private schools teaching Hindi.

The key imperative is that along with Hindi *all* the other Indian languages must also come out of the shadow of English. Changes in the school curriculum need to be accompanied by the systematic creation of a pool of competent translators, so that Indians can read the best in all the languages of the country. If this is achieved, it would be enough of a revolution, for once a people develop a love and respect for what is their own, the rest—including the project of a national language—will follow. Professor Namwar Singh makes the crucial point that no language can be *substituted* by another. Like mother's milk, our mother tongue is something we acquire in our childhood; a foreign language can be an additional acquisition but never an alternative to it.[19] The respected Kannada author U.R. Ananthamurthy echoes the same thought: 'We are going to lose our memory. We need English, but not of the "call-centre" sort. It is not a gateway to knowledge. We need to create in our own language. The English elite in India are not as cultured as the masses. English must be taught but

children in schools need to create in their own languages, because we don't think in English. It is a received language.'[20] The awareness must dawn on us that there is no great nation without its own language of which its people are proud. And a people who continue to regard another's language as their own ultimately become caricatures, for themselves and for others.

Some years ago, when the world was already in the new millennium, I accompanied Gaj Singh, the affable erstwhile Maharaja of Jodhpur, to the small hamlet of Ossian in Rajasthan, some sixty kilometres from Jodhpur, in the middle of the desert, where a luxury tented resort is run by a plucky entrepreneur. Since the route is off the main highway, the road was rutted and uneven, and the countryside mostly deserted, except for the occasional village, lit up in the engulfing Indian dusk by a few naked bulbs outlining the familiar clutch of people around the chai shop. Suddenly, in the near wilderness, I saw a huge hoarding: LORD WILLIAM BENTINCK HIGH SCHOOL—DAY AND RESIDENTIAL.

The remnants of British rule are difficult to erase. Even in a region where I can guarantee that almost nobody knows who Bentinck was, and certainly nobody can pronounce his name.

4

COLONIAL AMNESIA: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

On 5 October 2003, as the promise of another glorious winter began to dispel the heat of summer, forty-two Englishmen arrived in New Delhi. They were part of the Lutyens Trust Events Committee, and included six members of the Lutyens family, among them, his two great-grand-nephews, Charles and Derek. The visitors were accorded a welcome that far outstripped their expectations. Their impending arrival was heralded in the papers, and as Charles would later recall, 'the media pounced on us as soon as we arrived'[1] repeatedly wanting to know whether they thought India was properly looking after the work of their grand-uncle. The *Indian Express* photographed them in moonlight, standing 'romantically' against the backdrop of the Secretariat Buildings. Not to be outdone, the *Hindustan Times* showed 'Charles between two lamps like a happy gnome between two toadstools'.[2] A little baffled by all this excitement, the *Guardian* ran a story back home on the tumult the Lutyens were creating.

The visitors were given a welcome by the rich and powerful befitting royalty. Abdul Kalam, the President of India, gave them tea at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Jagmohan, the minister of tourism and culture, hosted them for dinner. Amarinder Singh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala, and the chairman of India's apex heritage and conservation

body, The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), arranged a 'magical evening' at his palatial residence, personally moving around the candlelit tables so that his guests 'take in the full joys of a balmy Delhi evening'. Shiela Dikshit, the chief minister of Delhi, was their host for a lunch at the Maurya Sheraton, where, as one of the group recalled, 'the food was a choice mixture of western and Indian dishes and the four courses rather exceeded one's normal luncheon intake, contributing perhaps to some uncharacteristic lethargy at the subsequent visit to Jaipur House'.[3] When the group visited Baroda House, originally designed by Lutyens as the residence of the Maharaja of Baroda, and now the headquarters of the Indian Railways, they were surprised to find 'what seemed to be a fair proportion of the 1.6 million employees' lined up in 'a welcome committee on an imperial scale. We progressed past the smiling and waving hosts until at the entrance to the boardroom we were met by a party of beguiling flower ladies. Showered by rose petals and garlanded like Apollo, we were introduced to the top management of this vast enterprise', after which 'refreshments capable of satisfying the appetite of a regiment were circulated'.[4] Charles Lutyens was asked to speak, and he was so carried away that he even sang a song to thunderous applause.

On another evening they were given special permission to 'dine and inspect that shrine of Imperial and now Indian respectability, the Delhi Gymkhana Club', and noted that 'the seamless continuation of club life throughout the radical changes in regime, culture and fashion of the past sixty years is a striking feature of all the major Indian cities'.[5] Their generous host, Bindu Manchanda, had arranged for a handsome meal under the open sky, and apparently had some problems extracting all of the party from the fulsome temptations of the bar. Their last day 'devoted to the ecclesiastical manifestations of the Imperial spirit' was topped by a dinner at the home of Mr and Mrs Shiban Ganju, and 'excelled our most sanguine hopes'. It was a 'sumptuous' evening, where Delhi's social elite jostled to talk to Lutyens' nephews, and 'drinks in amazing variety and amazing colours appeared and quickly disappeared'.

S.K. Mishra, a distinguished civil servant, and then the vice-chairman of INTACH, had worked hard to upgrade the visit of this delegation. He had also arranged a discussion at the prestigious India International

Centre on Lutyens and the need to preserve the Lutyens Bungalow Zone (LBZ). An overflowing audience listened attentively to renowned architects and conservationists speak with fervent admiration of the great man's legacy. Joginder Khurana, an architect trained at Harvard, compared Lutyens' Delhi with L'Enfant's Washington and Haussman's Paris. Other participants spoke eloquently about how Lutyens worked to achieve a genuine synthesis between the east and the west and combine Indian craftsmanship with western architecture. His desire to relate the new city with the old was also mentioned. Dr Mervyn Miller, architectural adviser to the Lutyens Trust, lectured gravely on the subject of 'Learning from Lutyens', stressing his international stature, while another architect in the delegation, Charles Morris, lamented the fact that he had not seen many tourists, and advised Indians on the need to do more to project and promote the rich heritage of the iconic builder. The writer and conservation enthusiast Shobita Punja had specially produced for INTACH a book for schoolchildren. Titled *A Capital Story*, it told the story of the building of New Delhi, and was released on this occasion.

Edwin Lutyens, who had no doubts whatsoever about his own accomplishments, would have expected to be lauded and fêted. But even he would have been surprised at how the Indians, who outdid each other in paying homage to him and his legacy, could completely forget, or, inexplicably, be totally unaware of, his passionate contempt for them and their culture. After all, he had never made any attempt to hide his feelings. An unapologetic spokesman of British imperialism, he built the Viceroy's Palace as a symbol of the glory of the Raj, and considered Indians to be primitives as yet on the verge of civilization who deserved to be ruled in perpetuity by the British. This assessment of the celebrated architect is not mere conjecture. In 1985, the publishing house Collins in London brought out a book, *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his Wife Lady Emily*. Edited by Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley, it is an unabashed and emphatic record of what Lutyens thought of India and Indians.[6] Lutyens was a prolific letter writer, so what we have before us is not the odd, stray comment, but an entire corpus of sustained racist denunciation.

It is important to refer to these letters in some detail, because the fact that they were written and *published* provides incontrovertible evidence of the views of this man, and by extension—given how he is venerated by many Indians—a graphic illustration of the kind of amnesia that afflicts the colonized. Nothing about India impressed Lutyens—not the architecture, not the philosophy, not the topography, not the music and dance, and certainly not the people. India's greatest flaw, of course—and this is not to be glossed over—was the colour of its people. The 'natives' were 'blacks' and quite clearly beyond redemption. On arrival in 1912, and before he began to seriously work on his drawings, he took a tour across some parts of the country. Of a train journey from Delhi to Bombay, he had this to record: 'Some fat blacks [had] occupied the only ladies carriage—and you mustn't occupy a carriage they have used. They don't know how to use the lavatory basins, and they use them for all sorts of purposes. The poorer nations they taught to use a WC by putting a looking glass in such a way [that] their irresistible curiosity compelled them to sit!'[7] At Daly College at Indore he asked to meet the students, and described them as 'dear little nigger chaps'. In Benares, while cruising down the Ganga on the Maharaja's steamer, he primarily noticed 'every sort of black body doing every sort of thing'. About the people of Madras he wrote: 'But oh the people—the scallywags. Awful faces, to me degenerate, very dark, very naked, and awful habits of hair dressings. The bulk of the faces merely loony . . .'[8] Back in Delhi at a state ball where some members of the Indian royalty were present, he observed that the rajas dressed well enough but they didn't dance, 'which is a pity, but the only possible solution to the horror of seeing a black man embrace a white woman'.[9]

Apart from this racist arrogance, his views on the skills and abilities of the 'natives' were breathtakingly contemptuous. 'The natives do not improve on acquaintance,' he wrote. 'They are children without the charm of heaven, and there seems a lot of carnal pleasure. And the caste rule rules out any broad line of Christianity.'[10] Condescendingly he accepts that India could in some ways be amusing 'but the low intellect of the natives spoils much and I do not think it possible for the Indians and whites to mix freely and naturally. They are very, very different and even my ultra wide sympathy with them cannot admit them on the same plane as myself . . . for one or the other to leave his place is unclean and unforgivable.'[11] He was consumed with disgust

for the country and its people—'The average Indian seems a hopeless creature'—that left no place for understanding or accommodation. 'I am not impressed by the intellectual sides of any religion I have seen here . . . the housing of people here seems extraordinarily unintelligent . . . the natives can do nothing without making a mess of it and have no idea of appliances, of economy or any sort of cleanliness . . . apart from their own bodies.'[12] About his personal staff his dismissive take was that they were 'various odd people with odd names who do all the things that bore the white man'.[13] When he visited the home of Rai Bishamber Nath, his engineer, he found his 'host's taste was appalling and of a mad child order'. The pictures in the house were 'the most dreadful chromo prints of smirking women covered with a sort of small-pox of luster sequins to represent nose, ear and lip'.[14] Confronted with a Hindu idol he was revolted—'terrible . . . a creature with four arms and as many legs'. Invited to a rich Hindu's new house, he thought it 'ugly and without charm', and its owner 'a yellow cringing Mephistopheles' with a 'fat podgy son who had been to England—Ugh! Dark and ill-smelling and glad-to-be-away place.'[15] At another Indian's home he thought the elaborate refreshments were 'weird . . . very strange and frightening', and when some were packed for him to take he gave them away to his servants.

The blind revulsion prevented Lutyens from assessing what was changing in India, and he maintained a narrow and very imperialist vision of the burgeoning freedom movement. For him, Indians *deserved* to be ruled by the British, not only because the British were a superior race but because the Indians were born inferior in every way and in need of civilization. In his letters he often refers to Indians as children, needing to be guided and incapable of doing anything constructive on their own. 'The nationalist movement here,' he reported to his wife in 1913, 'is exactly as though the children of a nursery rose against their nurse.'[16] Mirroring long-standing imperialist prejudices, he thought the Indian people were naturally submissive, and wished only for the 'reinstatement of an Englishman' as Resident. 'Their tradition—clan against clan and treachery, a certain clever sliminess and vice . . . and it will be years before they are fit to govern themselves with any sense of justice or of fairness.'[17] This supreme assumption of the right to rule could on occasion become vicious. Annoyed by what one of his

minions had done, he fumes: 'They ought to be reduced to slavery and not given the rights of man at all and beaten like brute beasts and shot like man eaters.'[18] This from a man who could be blatantly fawning and obsequious with his British superiors. He once famously wrote to Viceroy Hardinge's wife: 'I will wash your feet with my tears and wipe them with my hair. True, I have very little hair, but then you have very little feet.'

Lutyens' most vocal condemnation was about Indian architecture. 'Personally I do not believe there is any real Indian architecture or any great tradition,' he wrote. 'They are just spurts by various mushroom dynasties with as much intellect in them as any other art nouveau . . . And then it is ultimately the building style of children.'[19] He was convinced that anything at all redeemable in Indian architecture was due to the influence of the west, but even that was destroyed by the natives. 'The Hindus knew little and the Moghuls little more of any ethic of construction and art in relation to them. The Moghuls took Italian forms and mutilated them.'[20] The Mughal style of building was in his view little more than 'cumbrous ill-constructed buildings covered with a veneer of stone and marble and very tiresome to the western intelligence'.

Not surprisingly, his comments were scathingly dismissive of almost all the architectural landmarks in India, displaying a complete lack of sensitivity to the lifestyles of other socio-cultural traditions. He ridiculed the beautifully carved throne in the Diwan-i-Khas of the Red Fort in Delhi because it would only allow a man to 'squat cross-legged'. The exquisite panels in pietra dura of birds and animals he called 'tommy rot'. The Indian technique of joining marble slabs was plain 'nonsense'. About the Qutub he wondered, 'Why should we throw away the lovely subtlety of a Greek column for this uncouth and careless and unknowing and unseeing shape?'[21] The ancient city of Mandu in central India was to him 'childish and quite inconsequent and built to destroy itself', somewhat picturesque but 'with no intellect', good only for those 'who wear no clothes and want no furniture . . . freakish monstrosities, ruthless and squalid with no real nicety'.[22] The Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines along the ghats in Benares appeared like 'a cactus or children's toy tree on a steep mountainside, decorated at the top with flags on crazy bamboo poles . . .'[23] Holkar's palace in

Bombay was 'very vulgar', and the palace at Udaipur 'barbaric'. The imposing Bikaner Fort was 'a large barbaric pile with some good lacquer work and other decorations inside. Some of it was too awful for words. Gods, Goddesses, Kings carved and jewelled and painted—no gollywog could better it.'[24] The Elephanta caves almost passed muster: 'Rather wonderful and some evidence of real beauty,' he conceded. 'But how can you achieve beauty with a Ganesha . . .?'[25]

Even the magnificent Taj Mahal did not amount to much for this man. 'People go head over heels with their admiration for the Taj,' he lectured to his wife, 'but compared to the great Greeks, Byzantines, Romans, even men of the caliber of Mansard, Wren etc, it is small but very costly beer, and alongside the Egyptians it is evanescent . . . The third dimension seems beyond [the natives'] philosophy and they never get beyond carpet patterns and their carpets . . . inspire their architecture.'[26] The incandescent beauty of one of the wonders of the world on a full moon night left our finicky aesthete unmoved. The Taj by moonlight 'becomes so bald and indefinite', he wrote. 'It is wonderful but not architecture . . . And so it is with all these Indian builders. Anything really admirable has been done by an Italian or a Chinaman. For the rest it is all pattern—just the same as any carpet hung up. The buildings are tents in stone and little more. Elaborated to howdahs, stone buildings which when put up are carved and carved and carved without any relation to the stone, its purpose or location. The Indians of today have no sense of construction decorated.'[27] The denunciation allows for no inflection of doubt. It is consistently and categorically hostile. His basic premise is that India has no architecture worth the name, only 'veneered joinery in stone, concrete and marble on a gigantic scale . . . but no real architecture and nothing is built to last, not even the Taj'.[28]

The Indian craftsmen he was compelled to work with drove him to despair. There were painters from Bengal at work at the Viceroy's Palace (now Rashtrapati Bhavan), but Lutyens felt that they could hardly draw. 'They know only the most terrible patterns and those nerve wracking sodden gods and goddesses and to be mysterious and godlike you must draw everything wrong—foolishly methodless. Thank Very God of Very God that he wrought not our world on such lines . . .'[29] When the furnishings were being done, he thought the French and English materials made 'the Indian stuff and materials look silly'. As he inspected his handiwork in the finishing stages, he observed how 'careless the Indians were . . . forever damaging things and the messes they make! Horrible! . . . And the Indian never finishes anything and breaks fifty per cent of what he temporarily fixes . . .'[30] He wanted to buy a Buddha for his wife but nothing came up to par. 'Lord, how ugly everything Indian and Anglo-Indian is . . .' he despaired. He wanted to somehow educate Indian craftsmen, but felt the task was quite futile. 'I feel sure it's no use blunting one's own sense of righteousness by stooping to the inefficiencies of an atrophied architecture.'[31]

In evidence here is a sweeping disdain, an implacable belief that his civilization is inherently superior, and undisguised contempt for 'the natives'. Well into the twentieth century, this was a bit extreme even for diehard British imperialists. In a man outside of politics and trained in the arts, one would have expected to find some understanding, however small, of the culture of the country where he had come to work. But this was ruled out; Lutyens' mind was closed. 'I cannot allow the supremacy of the eastern over the western mind,' he declared. 'The Chinaman is an exception perhaps, but the Hindus and Muslims are mere children at the game.'[32] This attitude influenced Lutyens' work, of course, but also his interactions with Indians, even when they sometimes came from a background he approved. In a letter dated 27 February 1929, he recalls meeting 'a Pandit Nehru' at a party. This was Motilal Nehru, and since it appeared to Lutyens that Motilal was not without 'some wit', he invited him to lunch. From the description of what transpired, the repast was mostly a monologue by the host on the decline of Indian arts, and how 'deplorably behind [the] times' they were. The construction of the Viceroy's Palace was essentially 'an education to the Indian mason and craftsman', he told his guest, who—apparently—confessed that this angle to Lutyens' enterprise had not struck him. 'The only live thing in India [is] half-baked statesmanship and agitation,' declared the builder over coffee and port. It was a rather satisfying lunch, especially since Lutyens felt that Motilal was interested in what he said, and was, therefore, an agreeable kind of person. 'He is a dear old man, drinks whisky, port etc, mutton, everything. A black coat and Jodhpurs on which I drew

buttons so that he looked exactly like an English bishop. And that was all that he was fit for if he didn't help India in her material world.'[33]

Nothing of these racist sentiments, of the relentless hostility, was of any consequence to the group of influential Indians who laid out the red carpet for Lutyens' grand-nephews. Nor to the speakers and architecture experts at the India International Centre who displayed much scholarship when they assessed and praised Lutyens' work, but seemed oddly unaware of his thinking. Such is the nature of the amnesia that afflicts the formerly colonized. The victims are unable, even unwilling, to confront the fact of their own humiliation. They lose the ability to recall, and, even more important, to evaluate. An act of conscious forgiveness would be understandable, given the need to move beyond past acrimonies. But when genuflection is based on ignorance, and unthinking veneration of the white man's legacy, there is need to introspect and ask some tough questions about ourselves.

Edwin Lutyens, one of fourteen children of an Irish mother and an impecunious army captain turned artist, was born in 1869. Although he never completed his art school education, he was a talented architect and gave his career an early boost by marrying in 1889 Emily Lytton, the youngest daughter of the first Earl of Lytton, who was viceroy of India from 1876 to 1880. When he was selected in 1912 to plan the capital in Delhi, he had little experience of public buildings, except a few in South Africa. His specialization was in designing English country homes and gardens, and he had quite a fan following among the readers of *Country Life*. Vice president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, he was a pipe-smoking man about town, a member of the exclusive Athenaeum and Garrick Clubs, and on hobnobbing terms with the rich and smart set. In 1918, while he was building the Viceroy's Palace in the new capital of British India, he was knighted.

But his legacy wasn't always uncritically celebrated in Britain. In the late 1960s his architectural reputation was severely questioned by many who thought that he was essentially the last of those schooled in the Roman tradition. Reviewing his work, a leading commentator wrote in the influential *Architectural Review* that he 'contributed nothing whatsoever to the mainstream of development in 20th century architecture'. In 1968 the Royal Academy of Architecture could not raise more than £12,000 for a centenary exhibition and the project had to be dropped. His architectural resurrection had to await the 1980s, and this was linked to the emergence in Britain of the New Right. Classicism in architecture, as a living remnant of the heydays of British imperialism, was in good favour again, and there was no shortage now of funds. In 1981–82, the Hayward Gallery hosted a spectacular tribute to him.

In India, however, the graph of simplistic veneration never wavered. From the very beginning, Lutyens was deified, and any serious critique of his work was often considered blasphemy. The issue here is not one of merits, but of attitude. It is as if the 'natives', unable to remember what the man thought of them or to critically evaluate what he built, were simply awed into obeisance by the fact that a man of his stature had come to build for them. A photograph of Lutyens with his Indian bearer (included in *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his Wife Lady Emily*) provides a good visual illustration of such an approach. Lutyens, in a smart suit and a pipe on his lip, towers over his servant, the diminutive 'Persotum' (for Purushottam), who, in an oversized coat and ill-matching trousers and native cap, looks deferentially up to his master.

It could be argued that an assessment of Lutyens' work need not be influenced by the derogatory views he held of the local people and their culture. But how can the mind of the builder not inform what he builds? Buildings, especially grand buildings that define cities and neighbourhoods—and in this case an empire—are never strictly functional. The truth is that Lutyens' views of India and what he built in India are interlinked; his views influenced his work. If he had genuinely tried to evolve a style that amalgamated the best in Indian and western architectural traditions—as some of us Indians think he did—he might have deserved the great regard in which he is held. When New Delhi was being planned, some influential scholars and opinion makers in Britain argued that the new capital should encourage the projection of Indian architecture and art. But Lutyens was openly dismissive of such views. His purpose was simplistically to build a palace on western classical lines, and he made no secret of this. 'I want to revive in India,' he declared, 'a classic tradition such as the Greeks

gave her and by which she so greatly profited.' When it was known that even King George was inclined towards the Mughal style, Lutyens wrote indignantly: 'Fancy Shakespeare being asked by Queen Elizabeth to write an ode in Chaucerian metre.' It is a matter of historical record that he finally agreed to reluctantly incorporate some Indian features only on the insistence of Viceroy Hardinge, who felt that a palace built solely on European lines would defeat the imperial purpose of giving the natives something to identify with. But a creative synthesis would have required imagination and sensitivity, and these were quite beyond the abilities of a man who was convinced that Hindu architecture was 'beyond understanding', Mughal architecture was 'piffle', European hybrid architecture was 'half-caste' and only the European classic style was always 'better, wiser, saner'.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the greatest concentration of Indian motifs—elephant legs and sandstone bells—is found in the service entrance and the guardhouse of the Rashtrapati Bhavan. There are a few other tokenisms, like the occasional use of chhajjas, chhatris and jaalis, the stereotypical elephants at the main entrance—Lutyens used to draw dancing elephants for his children even before he came to India—and the use of temple-bell motifs and the Sanchi-patterned grille around the dome. The rhubarb- and biscuit-coloured sandstone adds great beauty and dignity to the building, but it is interesting that its use was recommended by the geological department, and Lutyens himself had originally preferred to use white marble. In fact, even the Mughal Garden was the idea of Lord Hardinge; Lutyens himself wanted an English garden. Essentially, therefore, his contribution was to replicate the classic European style, with the massive Corinthian columns dominating the façade of the building and the vaulted Darbar Hall clearly patterned on Hadrian's Pantheon. The attempt by later apologists, chiefly orchestrated by the Lutyens' Trust in London, to credit their hero with 'remarkable foresight and awareness of local factors', by which he supposedly allowed 'indigenous themes and details to shine through', is a transparent attempt to finesse the truth to fit the image—increasingly popular in Britain—of a benevolent colonialism that gave to the natives far more, or at least as much, as it took away from them.

The benevolent imperialist, who has the good of his subjects at heart

even if he reviles them, is the new hero in the neo-appraisal of colonialism. A good example of this ideology is the comment of the architect Andrew Wilton, who wrote in 2006 that the great dome of the Viceroy's Palace, which he had (rightly) thought earlier to be 'verging on the totalitarian', was actually 'an extraordinarily successful balance of motifs from European and Moghul architecture creating a highly original form . . .'[34] Such an interpretation would have certainly surprised Lutyens, for he was quite clear that the dome he had designed expressed 'the very essence of art for empire's sake'. He was not concerned about the need to bring in indigenous motifs, or to create a 'highly original form' blending the two. When he designed it he meant it 'to brood over the city, astoundingly animate, like the topeed head of a British soldier, district officer, missionary or viceroy, while great arms below grasp to subdue in their embrace an alien land and culture'.[35]

Some other aspects of Lutyens' planning are open to serious interrogation. Along with Herbert Baker he was part of the original search team to locate the site for the Viceroy's Palace. He chose Raisina Hill, the outcrop of hard rock on the western perimeter of Delhi that formed a part of the low-lying and ancient Aravali ranges. The elevation may have suited the imperial gaze, but there could have been better options, had an architect more sensitive to local history been involved. The important earlier cities of Delhi were all located on the Yamuna; the river had always been the most distinctive natural feature in the dust bowl of Delhi's plains. And the Aravalis, because of their role as the ecological lungs of the city, needed to be left untouched. Shah Jahan, the greatest builder among the Mughals, had built his city Shahjahanabad keeping the river as the focus; the Red Fort was on the river, and its exquisite pavilions and palaces overlooked it. Most of the great cities of Europe—indeed, London itself—were built along rivers. The problem of low-lying marshy land was common to all these cities, and need not have become an insuperable obstacle in devising a plan to imaginatively include the river in the design for New Delhi. Civil Lines, north of Kashmere Gate, where the foundation stone for the new city was originally laid during the Durbar of 1911, was one option adjacent to the river. The area south of the old city, abutting the river on either bank, was another possibility. But Lutyens'

architectural sensitivities were limited by his inability to see beyond a Parthenon-like acropolis looking down upon the natives. The Yamuna became a neglected periphery in this vision, and the legacy continues to take its toll. The river is today a cesspool, flowing on the fringes of the areas of power and influence, and a great natural asset has been devalued.

Another great loss was the manner in which New Delhi was planned without integrating, in some manner, the old city. The First Report of the Town Planning Committee of Delhi had resolved in 1913 that 'the important thing was that the new site must be Delhi—i.e., an area in close physical and general association with the present city of Delhi and the Delhis of the past'.[36] To ensure this, there were proposals to link Shahjahanabad to the new city by at least two major avenues, thereby preventing the isolation of the old city and achieving both urban integration and historical continuity. 'A long processional avenue was planned from the Fort, through Delhi Gate, past a park and a boulevard with the houses of Indian princes lining both sides. Another was to cut through the side of Jama Masjid from the proposed King Edward Memorial Park, and bear southward to the railway station, whence another road was to lead to Kashmere Gate.'[37] At least two influential British architects, Patrick Geddes (who visited India in 1914) and H.V. Lanchester, strongly supported this scheme, as did Sir Malcom Hailey, who even wrote an unsigned article in the *Times of India* arguing that the new Delhi should not be cut off from the old. But these roads were never built, and one cannot escape the conclusion that, given Lutyens' views on the natives and their architecture, the proposal did not matter very greatly to him. He saw himself as the architect of imperial Britain, which of course he was, but it was his very narrow and racist interpretation of this brief that straitjacketed his architectural vision. The conviction that everything about the natives was inferior made him see things in black and white: the new or the old, and never the twain should meet. This obstinate belief—even within an imperial outlook—that almost nothing from India's past should find a place in the building of New Delhi, has had extremely deleterious consequences for the evolution of the capital city. As the historian Narayani Gupta writes, if these roads had materialized, 'there might have been a closer integration between the two cities than did occur; there might not have occurred, either, the tragic metamorphosis of the "walled city" after 1947, when it became an inward-looking world hemmed in by the galloping urbanization all around . . .'[38] Today New Delhi continues to be an insulated bastion of the powerful elite, and the old city is a congested and neglected backwater whose architectural heritage is being destroyed with the same intensity as that with which the LBZ has been preserved.

The new capital stretching out from the foot of Raisina Hill was meticulously planned and is even today a haven of green, quiet and order in the urban chaos of the rest of Delhi. One of Lutyens' singular achievements was the planning of the wide boulevards that run through the city. (Though the beautiful trees along the main avenues were the choice of the horticulturist P.H. Clutterback, who had to struggle to convince Lutyens.) But overall, Lutyens made little attempt to be forward-looking or modern, and limited himself to a simplistic reiteration of colonial priorities: bungalows for the sahibs and servant quarters for those meant to serve them. The allocation of space in conformity with such a vision shackled New Delhi to the inequities of the past, and could not but be inimical to the proclaimed democratic ethos of the new republic born just two decades later. Lutyens wasn't expected to be sensitive to this development, although, if he had not been so blinkered by imperialist disdain, he could have anticipated it. Each bungalow—especially along the main avenues—was allocated acres of private space; some were located—and remain so today—in as many as five to six acres of fenced-off private territory for the use of a single individual or family. Behind these palatial homesteads built in the well-worn colonial style with nothing new or original about them, was an entirely different, congested world of back lanes and cramped servant quarters hidden from sight, and this is how things remain today. In other words, Lutyens institutionalized in brick and mortar the sahib-servant hierarchy, and while his imperial vision is understandable, the deification of this kind of city by the Indian elite and the bureaucratic-political leadership of democratic and independent India is embarrassing. Of course, the reasons are not difficult to understand. The LBZ suited perfectly the needs of the new elite that took over the reins of power from the British. The Indian sahibs rather liked the outsized bungalows for themselves, and did not think there

was anything really wrong in the army of servants crammed into the warren of tiny quarters somewhere at the back. Lutyens' New Delhi was, therefore, frozen in time not because its architectural attributes were unquestionable, but because it corresponded very well—and continues to do so—with the interests of the powerful and influential—first the British, and then the brown burra-sahibs.

In October 2007, the British Council and the London-based Lutyens Trust organized another extravaganza in New Delhi in tribute to its creator. Sixty-two architects, historians, members of the Lutyens Trust and six family members descended upon the capital. Margaret Richardson, honorary curator of architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts, and Paul Waite, architectural historian and Lutyens Trust Trustee, put together an exhibition at the British Council titled: 'Rashtrapati Bhavan in Context—The Work of Sir Edwin Lutyens O.M.' And once again several Indians genuflected in awe. With the sole exception of the historian Aman Nath, no one asked the inconvenient question; no one remembered Lutyens' racist dismissal of everything Indian; no one attempted, however respectfully, to critically reappraise his legacy. The members of the trust were fêted and fawned upon as on the previous occasion, and everybody listened attentively to their concerns that the LBZ should be preserved better.

Again, a not-so-subtle attempt was made to do an image make-over, to somehow give to Lutyens' character the benevolent image of the great synthesizer. The internet write-up on the exhibition began by announcing that 'one of the key themes of the exhibition is the interplay of influences in both directions: the deep influence of India (and her strong aesthetic traditions) on the work of Lutyens, as well as the influence of British architectural traditions on India's capital city'. It went on to argue how Lutyens willingly curtailed his 'beliefs in constructional logic and proportion' to accommodate Indian architecture. His damning and sustained dismissal of Indian architecture was glossed over by the passing comment that 'his initial impressions' were critical. There was inevitably, if unintentionally, the condescension: 'In Delhi he took a good deal of trouble in assembling and training the Indian craftsmen who would work on Rashtrapati Bhavan, and had always been enthusiastic for making the building of New Delhi the opportunity for establishing a training centre of building craftsmanship.'

Unaware of the contradiction, but keen to reinforce the theme of Lutyens as a great admirer of Indian skills, the text elsewhere says that 'his work in Delhi is brilliantly crafted by Indian workmen using traditional skills'. Finally, there is, of course, the familiar homily that the natives should do nothing to change the city he built, and take 'great care' to preserve the 'low density' of its planning.

The guardians need not have worried. The charter of INTACH on Lutyens Delhi, adopted in 2002, goes so far as to say that the names of the streets in the LBZ should never be changed. Article 13 of the charter states: 'The constant rechristening of streets and lanes in commemoration of national leaders, visiting dignitaries and tragic victims might flatter some egos and serve short-sighted ends, but they rob the city of its historic associations.' The argument is absolute; there is no deliberative tone which would allow for some road names to be kept and others to be reviewed. The capital of independent India, so the writers of the charter would have it, must not have any streets that recall its own leaders or writers or poets or artists. So mesmerized are they by Lutyens that their only desire is to fossilize in perpetuity every detail of what he and his masters built as the capital of British India. In many respects, their vision is as elitist and imperialist as their hero's. They would like that the 'housing in the back lanes [read servant quarters] should be relocated to suitable locations' two kilometres outside the LBZ (Article VI). The sacred altar of the great architect should not be sullied by the hoi-polloi, the menials who must yet be available for service. 'Each bungalow in the LBZ has between 5–12 servant quarters and with inclusion of support staff the population density averages between 40–60 per bungalow,' protests the charter, and this has 'resulted in many unauthorized spill offs, and in jhuggi-like constructions in the back lanes of New Delhi'. Lutyens was not the architect of the back lane-wallahs, and nor are his current band of conservationist devotees at INTACH. No attempt was made by INTACH to try and see how an imaginative, even if marginal, reuse of land could provide better amenities and housing to those who live in the servant quarters. The solution is simply to banish them somehow, and to freeze the LBZ in unthinking homage to its maker.

And yet, Lutyens' 'genius' isn't really the reason why New Delhi is—and will remain, at least in the foreseeable future—the way it is. Not the faultless vision of that colonial architect, but the unfortunate fact that the architectural genius of India was crippled during the years of British rule, is the real reason why we see so many defend the project to preserve Lutyens' Delhi. The genuine fear is that the current crop of Indian architects and bureaucratic planners might substitute it with something that is likely to be infinitely worse. The dialectics of the colonial process has to be understood for the double jeopardy it involves: it makes the colonized admirers of the very people who rubbish their cultural and artistic abilities, and, in the process, severs them from their own time-tested skills and aesthetic traditions, reducing them to bad imitators. Three hundred years ago Indians would have laughed at the thought of a foreigner needing to set up a centre to *teach* their craftsmen to build. The reaction would be understandable: after all, the planned cities of the Indus Valley civilization were built some 3000 years before the birth of Christ. The Vedic texts refer to forts and citadels, and the *Rig Veda* speaks convincingly of a palace of a thousand doors and as many columns. The Mauryan empire (321–232 BC) saw Indian craftsmen build stupas and chaityas and vast and complex shrines from natural rock, as well as sophisticated secular buildings such as the palace at Pataliputra (modern Patna). The grammarian Panini (520–460 BC) refers to well-developed Hindu temples, and later these evolved into the northern Nagara style with its stepped pyramid roofing structures, and the southern Dravida style best seen in the magnificent Brihadeeswara temple at Thanjavur or the Sun Temple at Konarak.

Significantly, this was not a process of random evolution. The canons of architecture were codified in more than one treatise, the most famous being the *Mayamatam* and the *Mansara*, compiled during the Chola period over a thousand years ago. Maya, the divine architect, is said to have authored the 3300 verses and thirty-six chapters of the *Mayamatam* which deal extensively with the choice of sites, the form of construction and iconography. The *Mansara*, similar in nature, is even longer, comprising 5400 verses in seventy chapters. Pre-dating both of these by at least another thousand years is the Vaastu-shastra, or the science of architecture, which was already well known in Vedic times. Suffice to say that several hundred years before the British came, Indian architecture had evolved a sophisticated vocabulary and idiom of its own, congruent to the felt needs and requirements of its people. If there is any doubt about this, a visit to just one site should set it to rest: Ellora, near Aurangabad, where thirty-five exquisite Buddhist, Jain and Hindu temples were carved out of the vertical face of the Charanandri hills between the fifth and the tenth centuries CE. In particular, the multi-storeyed Kailash temple, designed to recall Shiva's abode of Mount Kailash, is an architectural wonder. Covering an area twice the size of the Parthenon in Athens, it is carved out of a single rock, and required the excavation of 200,000 tonnes of rock. This confident architectural dexterity can be gauged too in northern Karnataka, in the magnificent city of Hampi, now in ruins, which was built as the capital of the Vijayanagara empire in the fourteenth century.

With the coming of the Muslims around 1000 CE, Indian architecture absorbed the influences of Central Asia and Persia. The Turks and Afghans came to conquer, and their first encounter was both violent and destructive, but they stayed on to make India their home. Their rulers set up dynasties, but Hindu craftsmen helped them to build their forts and mosques and palaces. The arch, the dome, the minaret and the vault became a part of the vocabulary of Indian architecture in a process that enriched both the indigenous tradition and that of the newcomers. The Mughals who came in the sixteenth century only further developed and embellished this evolving synthesis. The Taj Mahal and the city of Fatehpur Sikri at Agra perhaps best illustrate this creative and appealing blending of traditions, but its influence can be seen all over India, in the havelis of the north, the wadas of Maharashtra, the pols of Ahmedabad, the forts of Rajasthan, the charbagh gardens across the country and the pitched roofs of houses in Kerala.

Why did Indian architecture lose its animating and living impulse during British rule? What set Indian architects and craftsmen, who could construct grand temples by sculpting entire mountains, or build a mausoleum like the Taj Mahal, to produce structures like Shastri Bhavan and Udyog Bhavan along the central vista in New Delhi—both unimaginative monstrosities so completely adrift from the highly stylized and sophisticated traditions they had evolved over centuries?

The answer lies in the nature of British occupation. The British judged Indian art and architecture from a ruler's conviction that their principles of aesthetics and of shape and form were the ideal; from this point of view, Indian architecture was, as James Fergusson stated in his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 'a mistake nothing can redeem'. The beautiful temples of the south had no appeal for him, for they lacked 'those lofty aims and noble results which constitute the merit and greatness of true architectural art'.[39] The Madurai temple he found particularly barbarous—'the most vulgar building in all of India'—while Sanchi 'showed neither delicacy nor precision'.[40]

Such prejudice and arrogance was reinforced by a conscious policy of excluding traditional architectural skills. E.B. Havell, who was the principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta in the early 1900s, and whose views we shall discuss in greater detail elsewhere, points out that the public works department under British rule made it a policy to ignore indigenous knowledge and expertise. Indian masons and stone carvers, paid at the rate of two rupees a day, were instructed only to copy the regulation European ornament prescribed by the European architect, so that the Indian builder became just 'a bad imitator of inferior European architecture'. Lord Curzon turned down a proposal to invite Indian master builders in the construction of the Victoria Memorial at Calcutta on the plea that Indian methods of construction could not create a space as large as what was envisaged. The argument was laughable, and clearly illustrative of institutional hostility, for as Havell rightly points out, 'the architects of Bijapur, who invented the ingenious and beautiful method of balancing the weight of a dome inside a building, instead of outside, constructed buildings with a floor space greater than that of the Parthenon of Rome'. Such disdain for Indian artistic traditions, and the lack of opportunity and patronage that was its consequence, almost completely destroyed the natural evolution of India's architectural heritage, disrupting the web of delicate and time-tested linkages between structure, need, functionality, climate, custom and form. The result was an artistic wasteland devoid of inspiration or role models, and, increasingly, of the indigenous skills refined over centuries.

The tragedy was that members of the Indian royalty, who had always been the biggest patrons of Indian architecture, now forsook their own heritage. If earlier the British built palaces and memorials in their own image designed by European architects, now leading members of the Indian royalty hired English architects to build their mahals. Ironically, this preference for a foreign aesthetic over one's own gained momentum in the final years before 1947. Many of these foreign architects were men who had lost out to Lutyens and Baker in the construction of New Delhi, but were still good enough for the Indian elite for whom their appointment was a status symbol, a means to flaunt their connections with the British rulers. In 1919, the Indian royals were inducted into a Chamber of Princes and needed residences in Delhi when they came to attend its meetings. Osman Ali Khan, the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, built Hyderabad House in 1928, and managed to get Lutyens to design it. Planned in the shape of a butterfly, it was the largest of such palaces, and while it was meant to have some Indian features, the Nizam's sons found it much too western and hardly ever used it. The Maharaja of Jaipur was allotted land opposite the Nizam's, and built the Lutyens-style Jaipur House. Another neighbour was Maharao Umed Singh II, the scion of the kingdom of Kota in eastern Rajasthan. In 1857 the Kota army had revolted and attacked the British Residency, but in 1938 Umed Singh wanted his Delhi palace to reflect the imperial art deco form, a style that did not even pretend to incorporate Indian motifs, but was much sought after only because it was the new thing in Europe. Havell would not have approved, but there was nobody willing to listen to him.

Art deco originated in France in the 1920s and was France's favourite calling card in the decorative arts at that time. Its radical modernism was part of the evolution of architecture in the west, and its essential principles, including the use of materials like aluminium and steel to celebrate the machine age, were understandable in that context, but completely alien to India. Transplanting this 'style moderne'—as the French called it—on Indian soil was not about the enlightened eclecticism associated with the assimilative cultural history of India, but an act of mindless imitation. A style that did not look out of place in the interiors of cinemas in Europe, or on the Golden Gate in San Francisco, or in European ocean liners and American railway stations built in the 1930s, was transported into the living spaces of the Indian

rich merely because it was the rage in the west. As often happens in such cases, the 'originators', to whom the style belonged as an organic part of their architectural evolution, could discard it after the Second World War for being too minimalistic or gaudy, while the 'emulators' persisted with it until well into the 1960s.

Perhaps the most flamboyant expression of a building furnished in the art deco style is the Umaid Bhavan palace in Jodhpur. It was commissioned in 1943 by the then ruler of the Jodhpur kingdom, Maharaja Manvendra Singh, as a means of providing employment to his impoverished people during a period of drought and famine. Manvendra Singh was a traditional Rajput ruler, but had been educated in England, and loved polo and flying. His choice of architect for Umaid Bhavan was, expectedly, not any descendant of the master builders who could design and construct the magical forts and havelis of Rajasthan, but an Englishman, H.V. Lanchester, who had tried but failed to get the commission to build New Delhi. If Lutyens and Baker could build the new capital, Jodhpur could at least have the British architect who lost out. In January 2005, Renuka and I were invited by Manvendra's son, Gaj Singh, for his fifty-seventh birthday. We were received at the airport by men in traditional attire, jodhpurs, achkans and resplendent turbans, and driven to Umaid Bhavan in an open vintage Buick. On the way we passed an open ground which we were told was still famous because Winston Churchill once played polo there. A few other, less exalted, landmarks later, we were at the enormous palace, which stands on a mound, a huge blob of burnished sandstone towering over the stunted landscape.

Lanchester was not an incompetent architect. And yet, his creation in Jodhpur is a curious hybrid. The stone in which it is built is indigenous. Some stylistic elements are also Indian, such as the ornamentation, and the principal dome that soars into the sky. But once the awesome size of the structure is taken in, there is an uncomfortable aftertaste, as though somehow its maker was hopelessly out of sync with Indian aesthetics, and had deliberately used the monumental scale of construction to camouflage or compensate for this. All the elements you would expect in an Indian palace are there—pillars, domes, arches, jaalis, chhatris, courtyards and minarets—but not in the right proportion. Something is amiss, as would happen to a dish if a lauded chef inexplicably loses his sense of proportion and forgets the sequence and quantities in which the ingredients are to be mixed. The dome looks awkward, not rising effortlessly from its base as that of the Taj Mahal; the four minarets strangely flatten out towards the top, recalling less the grace of a pinnacle and more the lines of a distorted Chinese pagoda. The main veranda, with its huge colonnades and the vast lawn stretching below, is English, but at the end of the vista is a traditional baradari.

What Umaid Bhavan lacked in aesthetics was more than made up for by the old-world warmth and hospitality of Gaj Singh, the current Maharaja popularly known as 'Bapji', and his charming wife Hemlata. Gaj Singh, who enjoys the title of Maharaja only in name ever since Indira Gandhi abolished princely privileges and privy purses in 1967, was just four when his father died in an air crash. His mother quickly packed him off to school in England. He would have probably been sent there anyway but she was in a hurry, afraid of palace intrigue against the infant heir apparent. The young prince studied at Harrow and went on to Oxford. He returned to his kingdom only at the age of twenty-four, and almost the whole of Jodhpur came out on the streets to welcome him back. Unlike many of the former royalty, Gaj Singh learnt to cope with a republican India. He converted Umaid Bhavan into a luxury hotel (retaining a part of it as his personal residence), created the right family trusts, flirted with politics, and now devotes himself to heritage conservation and development projects.

The celebrations of Bapji's birthday provided a wonderful opportunity to observe the schizophrenia that afflicts the Anglicized post-colonial Indian from a heavily traditional background. The scale of the celebrations is much reduced now, so an entire programme of events involving local people was crowded into two days. On the first day we drove in procession to the magnificent Mehrangarh Fort, built by Gaj Singh's ancestor Rao Jodha in 1459 and expanded and embellished by the rulers who followed, in particular Jaswant Singh in the seventeenth century. Mehrangarh is one of the largest forts in Rajasthan, and within its ramparts are some of India's most beautiful palaces, home to the royal family until less than 150 years ago. Today, the Mehrangarh Fort, whose architectural authenticity is drawn from centuries of lived experience in sync with the local culture and living conditions, is

overshadowed by Lanchester's Umaid Bhavan, and has become a museum, the history and culture it sustained a curiosity. The fort with its traditional courtyards and palaces and art work, and the palace designed by the British architect and furnished in the art deco style, stand facing each other, like monumental metaphors of what once was and what had replaced it, and of the two worlds that the educated Indian has been forced to inhabit, whether at the level of a maharaja or a middle-class person: worlds created by the disruption of continuity and the mutilation of choice. The result is several million Indians leading strangely parallel lives, and an entire people condemned to the confusions and inequities of a schizophrenic national ethos—a condition that no one who hasn't been colonized will ever experience or understand.

Walking in the Mehrangarh Fort I ask myself where all the artisans have gone who could produce fabulous artefacts in camel bone and silver, adorn hookah bowls with stunningly delicate carvings and embellish lacquer paintings so skilfully. I look at the royal costumes, the gold-plated palanquins and chiselled swords, the incredibly rich carpets, the fantasy-world objects in mirror work, the royal tents and carpets, and think of a time when excellence was a product of the soil and of tradition, untainted by mimicry or the need to be judged by a foreign aesthetic. The jaalis in red sandstone are so intricate that it is difficult to believe that the craftsmen had worked on stone, not wood. I am told that no cement has been used in the construction; the walls and roofs are joined by an interlocking system that has stood the test of time. The Sheesh Mahal, where all the walls and the ceilings are covered with pieces of mirror, is so designed that a single candle flame is reflected from a million pieces. I pause at the mujra room, where courtesans would sing and dance for the Maharaja and his guests, and marvel at the ivory-inlaid doors, the walls covered by gold leaf and the elaborate chandeliers.

I leave Mehrangarh with a gnawing sense of loss, not merely nostalgia for a past that cannot—and perhaps should not—be resurrected entirely, but a feeling that a certain aesthetic tradition that once was, and could perhaps have endured, has been greatly eroded, perhaps even lost. The pagoda-like minarets of Umaid Bhavan loom in the distance, and on the city streets I vaguely take in a huge hoarding

advertising a new housing complex where each home is guaranteed to look exactly like a Spanish villa.

In the evening we were invited for an early round of drinks to the house of Sundar Singh, an important Rajput notable, who is the right-hand man of Gaj Singh. The house was crowded with Indian artefacts, but rather incongruously, an entire wall of the living room was taken by a huge painting of Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo. Sundar Singh proudly informed me that it was the work of his daughter, who had copied it from an English book. The painting looked out of place, but I forced myself to say a few words of praise. Just then Sundar Singh's young and pretty daughter-in-law was introduced to me. She had studied management, and is deeply involved in her father-in-law's tourism business. We talked for a while, mostly in English, which she speaks very well. Soon it was time to leave. In a reflex action remarkable for its fluidity, she bowed to say goodbye. It was done in the traditional way, with all the grace that comes from being executed naturally, something she must have inherited from her mother, and she from hers. Napoleon's gaze followed us to the door as we left for Umaid Bhavan.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the founder of modern India, to whom the country must forever be grateful for his vision of a progressive and modern nation, was also, like many remarkable Indians of his generation and background, a product of the colonial experience. Nehru spent the formative years of his life as a student in England; his commitment to India's freedom was never in doubt, but in spite of himself, he could not but internalize key aspects of the colonial appraisal. 'It was natural and inevitable that Indian nationalism should resent alien rule,' he wrote in his autobiography, 'and yet it was curious how large numbers of our intelligentsia . . . accepted, consciously or unconsciously, the British ideology of Empire . . . The history and economics and other subjects that were taught in the schools and colleges were written entirely from the British imperial view-point, and laid stress on our numerous failings in the past . . . We accepted to some extent this distorted version, and even when we resisted it instinctively we were

influenced by it.'[41] Without doubt, Nehru must not have wanted to be influenced by the colonial critique of India's past, but because he was extraordinarily perceptive he could understand why this could happen even against one's will—as indeed happened in his own case. A yearning for a modernity heavily influenced by western notions, and a rejection of the past strongly influenced by colonial assessments, became key elements of Nehru's world view. It was a view born of a proud statesman's desire to see his country as the equal of any western nation, and it appeared recurrently in his well-intentioned exhortations to the Indian people.

For Nehru, the future of India had to be fashioned unencumbered by the burden of the past. In his writings and speeches, this conviction often reduced itself to a black-and-white representation where, mimicking colonial vocabulary, India's past became some kind of dark cesspool threatening to hold the country back from a necessary progress towards the pure white utopia of a rational, industrial and scientific state. 'India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present,' he wrote in his book titled, ironically enough, *The Discovery of India*. 'Our lives are encumbered with the dead wood of the past; all that is dead and has served its purpose must go.'[42] He railed against the 'dust and dirt of ages' that had mutilated India's image, and the 'excrescences and abortions that have twisted and petrified her spirit, set it in rigid frames and stunted her growth'.[43] Tradition for him was of little value, because it was overlaid by 'dead thought and ceremonial', and was debilitated by the 'woeful accumulation of superstitions and degrading custom'.[44] 'We have to get out,' he exhorted, 'of traditional ways of thought and living which, for all the good they must have done in a past age . . . have ceased to have significance today.'[45]

Religious belief was one 'relic' of the past that particularly filled Nehru with horror. To be fair, he had little time for any religion, whether of the east or the west. He considered religion to be coterminous with superstition and obscurantism, and inimical to the 'scientific temper' which must be the attribute of the 'modern' man. 'Organized religion . . . encourages a temper which is the very opposite to that of science,' he wrote in *The Discovery of India*. 'It produces narrowness and intolerance, credulity and superstition, emotionalism and

irrationalism. It tends to close and limit the mind of man, and to produce the temper of a dependent, unfree person.'[46] His espousal of the scientific approach, and new knowledge based on new evidence and not preconceived theory, 'the hard discipline of the mind', as he put it, made him hostile even to the long-established and eclectic tradition of religious mysticism in India, which he described as 'vague and soft and flabby, not a rigorous discipline of the mind, but a surrender of mental faculties'.[47] Gandhi drew the inspiration for his message of religious harmony from the best in all religions. He was thus quintessentially religious in preaching communal harmony. Nehru, on the other hand, was a professed agnostic. In his last will and testament he wrote: 'I wish to declare with all earnestness that I do not want any religious ceremonies performed for me after my death. I do not believe in any such ceremonies and to submit to them, even as a matter of form, would be hypocrisy and an attempt to delude ourselves.' Of course, in spite of such expressly stated views, his last rites were performed in accordance with Vedic ritual and to the loud incantation of priests.

The interesting thing is that Nehru's emphatic rejection of the old and traditional did not suppress the tendency—common to the colonized—to romanticize the *remote* past, and reinvoke it in near-mythical terms, as something that was once pure and unsullied but had 'fallen' over the ages. Nehru, in fact, admitted that he could not resist the temptation to conjure India as Bharat Mata—Mother India—a very old but beautiful lady, imbued with nobility and greatness, her beauty 'wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions'.[48] The syndrome was familiar and predictable: rejection, in conformity with the critique of the colonizer, and glorification as a reaction to that critique. In the case of Nehru, however, the sentimentalism about the past was definitely subsidiary to his belief that India needed to free itself from its hold. The newly independent nation of which he was at the helm must, he was convinced, put on a new garment, for the old was 'torn and tattered' beyond repair.

Nehru's choice of Charles Edouard Jeanneret (1887–1965), the Swiss-French architect more famously known as Le Corbusier, to design the new city of Chandigarh, has to be understood in this context. The

invitation to him provides dramatic illustration of how, for the colonized, the future and the past are seen as irrevocably opposed, leaving only one choice: a past that must be rejected or a future without the past. Corbusier had very little to recommend him for the project of building an Indian city except that he was white, western and perceived to be ultra modern. The interesting thing, of course, is that his modernity was not acceptable to his own countrymen, and none of his futuristic plans were actually implemented in France or anywhere else in Europe. Only once, in Marseilles in 1915, had he been allowed to have his way when, according to critics, he succeeded in mutilating the happy Mediterranean ambience of this coastal town, with its bars and cobbled streets and street restaurants and quaint houses, by planting a massive concrete tower of twenty storeys. 'Raised on thick columns called pilotis, it housed a series of duplex apartments in its dense concrete framework. Each apartment was approached along an unlit internal corridor and its only overlook was across a square balcony. There the owners stood for a view of the immensely beautiful landscape in which they seemed trapped by the single-mindedness of a new architecture.'[49] Ten years later Corbusier proposed to build a new Paris, with skyscrapers and speedways and symmetrical parks, a plan 'that defied all existing social, cultural, economic, political, historical, architectural, anthropological, even ecclesiastical norms',[50] and would have destroyed more of historic Paris than the German bombs in the two world wars put together. Not surprisingly, his plan—known as the Voisin Plan—was rejected by the city fathers. By the 1950s, when he was approached to design Chandigarh, he was an architect past his prime, with few takers for his grandiose plans, a man with vision no doubt, but somewhat disillusioned, and with almost no work of any consequence to occupy him.

But destiny was about to take a turn for the Frenchman. Far away in India, a country about which he knew very little, a person no less than the prime minister had decided that he would be the best person to create a new city symbolic of the modernity India wanted to adopt. In his official notes and letters, Nehru referred to Corbusier as 'a genius of world reputation' and 'one of the biggest architects in the world'. He had no problems about Corbusier's ultra-radical ideas, or the fact that they had been rejected on aesthetic and sociological grounds in France and elsewhere. His requirement was for the new city to be sanitized of the cultural identifications of the past, because this alone would provide concrete proof of India's desire and capability for modernity, especially to the western world. The architectural historian Vikramaditya Prakash (whose father, Aditya Prakash, also an architect, was part of Corbusier's team of Indian architects), has insightfully observed that 'while the emergence into modernity is accepted in the West as part of the continuing devolution of its own history, in postcolonial India, modernity inevitably signifies a break with its own history, and the superiority of the west'.[51] Nehru's pronouncements while Chandigarh was being built clearly bring this out. For instance, in a speech at the inauguration of the Punjab High Court in the new city, he went so far as to say that if the state capital were to be located in one of the old cities, Punjab would find it very difficult to progress. 'I am very happy that the people of Punjab did not make the mistake of putting some old city as their new capital. It would have been a great mistake and foolishness. It is not merely a question of buildings. If you had chosen an old city as the capital, Punjab would have become a mentally stagnant, backward state. It may have made some progress, with great effort, but it could not have taken a grand step forward.'[52] Chandigarh was to be built to compensate the people of India's Punjab for the loss of the historic city of Lahore as a result of Partition. But Lahore, with its historic fort and traditional bazaars and canals and winding roads, was old in spirit, and Chandigarh was not to be so handicapped. Those who thought that one could be modern without excluding the past were, for Nehru, simply 'bogged down in their narrow-mindedness'. 'Especially in India,' he felt, 'people are so steeped in old customs and habits that often they cannot understand new ideas.'[53] Speaking at the Institution of Engineers he argued that Chandigarh was important because it was symbolic of 'not being tied down to what had been done by our forefathers and the like but thinking out in new terms . . . not in terms of rules and regulations laid down by our ancestors.'

Oblivious to the conditioning caused by colonial experience, Corbusier must have been very pleasantly surprised by the adulation he received in India. Unknown to him, he had become part of Nehru's passionately idealistic vision for a new India because the city he would

build would be 'unfettered by the traditions of the past, a symbol of the nation's faith in the future.'[54] The suitability or quality of his architecture was not of relevance; the fact that his designs were new and 'modern', even by western standards, was all that mattered. Nehru, with the candour only he was capable of, admitted as much. 'It is totally immaterial whether you like it [Chandigarh] or not,' he emphasized. 'It is the biggest thing in India of this kind. That is why I welcome it. It is the biggest thing because it hits you on the head and makes you think. You may squirm at the impact but it makes you think and imbibe new ideas, and the one thing that India requires in so many fields is to be hit on the head so that you may think.'[55]

Corbusier, the chosen midwife of the 'big idea', received a hero's welcome on arrival in India. All the terms he asked for were agreed to, including payment in much-scarce foreign currency, and the induction of his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, and two British architects, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, into his team. Already quite awed by his reputation, Nehru was further impressed when Corbusier lectured to him about how houses in India needed to have lower roofs and thinner walls and be sensitive to conditions for bathing in hot or cold water.[56] He was given a free hand to design the city, and if local people such as the chief minister of Punjab, Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, opposed any of his ideas, he had the liberty to write directly to the prime minister, who invariably interceded in his support.[57] Nine Indian architects were designated to assist him, and someone from the scores of minions on tap held up an umbrella to shield him from the fierce Indian sun as he inspected the undulating plains in the Himalayan foothills of a country he had never visited or designed for before. No one advised him that he should acquaint himself with aspects of Indian architecture, or travel a little to see variations of traditional buildings in the Punjab. In fact, quite happy without this exposure, he could claim with characteristic flourish that he had drawn the basic plan for the new city in just forty-eight hours.

The author André Malraux, who was also the French minister of culture at the time, recalls in his memoirs that Corbusier took him around Chandigarh's unfinished buildings, waving his hand to indicate where the Assembly would come up and where the lawcourts, 'while files of men and women were climbing the inclined planes, like the bowman of Persepolis, with baskets of cement on their heads'.[58] India's bureaucracy and red tape, especially if it did not agree with him, could be troublesome, but Corbusier was really quite the unquestioned creative patriarch, with a great many powerful Indians fawning around him constantly. Balkrishna Doshi, the well-known Indian architect who had the opportunity to work with Corbusier, remembered how imperious he could be. On one occasion, at a party in Chandigarh where many luminaries from the judiciary were present, he refused to shake hands with the judges, telling them bluntly that they did not dispense proper justice.[59] A rather interesting photograph shows how even his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret, could in 'jest' tie to a tree with a rope the original chief administrator of the Chandigarh project, the greatly respected and senior architect P.N. Thapar, while a group of Indians stood by smiling sheepishly.[60]

Among Doshi's other memories are that Corbusier liked Indian cows, miniature paintings, and tandoori chicken. Perhaps he would have come to appreciate a few more things had he ever spent more than two months in a year on the site. Even so, to Nehru he argued confidently on the need for India not to copy others, and this, of course, greatly enhanced his appeal for the prime minister. 'In the course of a conversation with M. Corbusier,' Nehru wrote to the Planning Commission, 'he told me that he was surprised and somewhat unhappy at the way we copied foreign models in our buildings and houses, regardless of our own climate and environment. We had got so used to the Anglo-Saxon approach, which was largely based on foreign engineers or on our own engineers who had received their training in foreign countries, that we tended to forget that India was somewhat different from these countries of the west. I think there was a great deal in what M. Corbusier told me and we should definitely investigate what changes we should make to make our buildings conform more to Indian conditions . . .'[61] The situation was, indeed, rich with irony. Nehru, who wanted Indians to break with tradition, was being convinced of the need to preserve it by a Frenchman who knew almost nothing about it. That such gratuitous, unoriginal advice should acquire an almost revelatory value for a fiercely nationalistic person who had spent his life fighting against unwanted foreign influence, is not the only thing of interest. Nehru's near-blind trust in

Corbusier is evidenced throughout the building of Chandigarh. In the speech at the inauguration of the Punjab High Court cited earlier, he admitted that he did not understand everything about Corbusier's planning. 'I cannot say that I can understand the true significance of every part which I see . . . later I shall request Monsieur Corbusier to explain it all to me.'[62] For the prime minister of India to say that of an Indian city—that he needed the foreign architect to *explain* what it was all about—*after* the city was complete, was an extraordinary admission, and only Nehru, because he genuinely believed that it was in India's interest to give Corbusier a carte blanche, could have made it publicly. It was a willing suspension of scrutiny, based on the faith that anyone who could bring in the new without reference to the old must be modern. That faith was enough; the rest would fall into place, because the message the new city was meant to give was more important than its design.

Chandigarh, as designed by Corbusier, was an extra-territorial transplant in direct opposition to the notion of aesthetics and ornamentation and to the ethos of an Indian city. Over the years it has, in spite of Corbusier, been Indianized; the unfamiliar geometric austerity has been partially camouflaged by the undergrowth of a lived city. But at the time when it was built it was the most spectacular symbol of something that was—self-consciously—modern in the western context but alien in the Indian. Apart from the master plan, Corbusier had personally designed the vast Capitol Complex, where the organs of state, the Legislative Assembly, the Secretariat and the High Court, were located. Each of them is conspicuous for the uninspiring linear use of tonnes of unfinished concrete, without any Indian features in ornamentation and embellishment, and all of them have deteriorated over successive Indian monsoons into drab, grey rain-streaked concrete boxes. The city is planned, no doubt, but its severe rationalism, without the intimacies and unpredictability of the traditional South Asian city, gives it the feel of a 'scientific' project implemented at the expense of local sensibilities.

What is particularly noticeable is how bereft it is of any association with Indian culture and heritage. The Chandi temple, after which the city is named, is, of course, completely ignored—and that must have pleased the evangelically secular Nehru—but, beyond that, there is not an arch, or minaret, or courtyard, or stone, or chhatri, or dome, or doorway that even attempts to be Indian in provenance. The city's residents were condemned to live forever in anonymous 'sectors'; their homes—like all government housing projects in modern India—were featureless blocks of brick and cement; the roads and boulevards recalled no bygone or living heroes; the gardens took no inspiration from the patterns of the past; and no sculptures or murals invoking the region's history were thought to be necessary. Careful municipal planning was evident, but it could not compensate for the absence of an animating soul. Even the 'designated' shopping areas, normally such a colourful feature of any Indian city, were designed in a nondescript, minimalistic and almost pedestrian manner—a row of shops in forgettable brick known only by the 'sector'. One cannot escape the impression that Corbusier wanted the residents of Chandigarh to have the mandatory 'conveniences' but little else. Gautam Bhatia, the sensitive architect and historian, rightfully bemoans the manner in which 'a great Cartesian grid of wide roads was arbitrarily dropped from the sky';[63] he concedes that geometric planning was one way of approaching a flat site, but 'the man-made ordering . . . was so severe—the roads marked straight along the edges of a T-square, the vision bound only by the curvature of the earth—that it only imposed a rectangular clutter on the city. The architecture that resulted was the unfortunate by-product of a stringent city plan; shopping centres were isolated into shadowless enclaves; as colonnaded blocks of concrete they rose from unqualified floors and formed the controlling backdrops to . . . great shadowless plazas.'[64] 'Like a controlled scientific experiment,' he writes, 'the city lived and grew in an architectural vacuum . . . its physical predictability, the sensory violence of its geometry . . . offering little of the unquantifiables and the intangibles that suggest a "city".'[65]

Such a critique is not intended to belittle Corbusier. In the context of the evolution of his own country's architecture, his brave futurism was of value. He was a man with the courage of his convictions, and the inability of his peers in Europe to understand or appreciate him never made him waver from his personal vision. The critique of his design for Chandigarh is not so much about his oeuvre per se, as it is about its *relevance* to India. The idiom and syntax of his concepts and drawings were located in Europe, part of the evolving psyche of the

west. He had neither the pragmatism nor the respect for local realities and cultural and historical traditions to even attempt a synthesis of his aesthetics and those of a newly independent but ancient country. And in the idealistic, rational and proud Nehru, eager to earn respect for his country in the eyes of the west and in the language of the west, he found a patron who encouraged this arrogant insularity. Chandigarh, therefore, rose as a monument to the post-colonial deference of India to the west, not as a statement of her rediscovery of herself. The city, intriguingly and unthinkingly celebrated as 'the city beautiful', is in fact a symbol of the *absence* of synthesis between what needed to be borrowed and what should have been preserved.

The inability to make such informed choices is the handicap of colonized nations. Colonizing nations don't have such a predicament. No one in Paris or Belgium or London ever needed to contemplate the possibility of an architect from Senegal or Congo or India designing an entire city for them that had nothing to do with their architectural traditions. There lies the inequity in the creative interaction between the colonizer and the colonized, and it is important to understand the historical reasons that made this possible even in newly independent nations that were committed to repudiating the influence of their past masters. It is significant, too, that the consequences of Chandigarh continued to be felt for years after the completion of the city. A generation of Indian architects grew up in thrall to Corbusier, leading to a great deal of unproductive imitation. As Gautam Bhatia writes with biting satire:

> And the ripples were slowly beginning to be felt throughout the land, and certainly much beyond the Punjab. Other native architects also began to congregate at Chandigarh to get a close glimpse of the master, to grovel at his white feet, so that generations to come would remember that they too were involved in the making of history ... They were his devotees, some from Madras and Ahmedabad and Bombay, staying close to his heels, and happily following his sacred routine. Some began to wear French berets and thick glasses. Others began to paint and write feverishly, discussing architectural polemics over wine and French toast in the faint hope that some day they too would achieve greatness. But they were not white, and Nehru was not looking for brown saviours. Their only hope lay in a lifetime commitment to Corbusian mimicry.[66]

Lutyens and Corbusier are revealing examples of the dialectics of colonialism. Architecture has been the single biggest aesthetic failure of modern India, because having lost the animating impulses of its own traditions it reduced itself to rudderless mediocrity and mimicry. The cities of India are dotted with a recent ugliness of form that is difficult to associate with a civilization that could produce wonders with brick and stone. The government is the largest sponsor of this unaesthetic excess, but private constructions are no better—the upmarket apartment complexes and malls that have mushroomed all over India, products of the new urban boom, are testimony to this. In late 2009—nearly a century after Lutyens' New Delhi was built and half a century after Corbusier's Chandigarh—two landmarks of urban Indian architecture were in the news: the Global Education Centre-2 (GEC-2) in the Mysore campus of Infosys, and the recently renovated New Delhi railway station. The former is a colossal semicircular building inspired, without subtlety, by classical Greek architecture, and the latter has a brand new Lutyens-style façade with huge white pillars and, perhaps as an element of modern design, purple glass. Both buildings are designed not for the benefit of the predominantly Indian clients who will use them but for first world approval: Infosys is India's famously global IT company, and New Delhi is preparing to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

In her brilliantly titled story 'Kings of Xeroxia' in *Outlook* magazine (9 November 2009), Shruti Ravindran points out the absurdity of building such structures in today's India. 'The GEC-2 might win the awe of its young executive trainees, and the New Delhi railway station the glancing attention (or dismay) of those hurrying through it,' she writes, 'but ... is imitating the architecture of the past—including colonial styles intended to intimidate and subjugate us—really the way to engage a contemporary public?' It isn't surprising that the unsuitability of the new façade of the capital's main railway station is

already apparent, with dust 'caking the purplish glass front'. Interestingly, even this incongruous design was a compromise; the original grandiose plan submitted by a Hong Kong-based firm to convert the station into a 'world-class' one was far more alien and absurd. Shruti quotes the noted architect K.T. Ravindran: 'It was the Postdamer Platz (station in Berlin) plan copy-pasted on to the New Delhi railway station . . . It had astonishingly little relevance to our context. It was unsustainable, an insult to this country.' Concluding her excellent story, Shruti Ravindran asks, 'When will we evolve our own "starchitects" and icon-makers?' and gives us Gautam Bhatia's answer: 'When we stop being imitative and become inventive . . . Right now, we see ourselves as second-rate; our approach is just to play catch-up to other cultures—the Chinese, the Europeans, or Lutyens. It's about time we followed our own instincts.'

There are, of course, some pockets of excellence—buildings that attempt to incorporate indigenous elements and are suited to our needs. But they constitute a near-invisible minority, and even here, much of the creativity is derivative. Urban kitsch will disfigure the soul of our new nation for a long, long time. While a bad song or dance has a finite life, a bad building survives to haunt us for decades.

5

CREATIVITY AND DISTORTION

Possibly 200 years before the birth of Christ, a gentleman called Bharata wrote a treatise of 6000 shlokas in Sanskrit called the *Natyashastra*. This seminal work is a meditation on every aspect of creative expression, including theatre, literary construction, music, dance and body movements, rhythmic patterns or tala, architecture, sculpture and painting. What is important, however, is that it does not purport to be only a technical manual. Bharata's encyclopaedic investigation is about what constitutes the aesthetic experience—rasanubhav. Rasa, or the sense of pleasure derived from artistic expression, is the primary concern in the text. What is rasa? How is it evoked? What are its manifestations? Who experiences it? What must an artist do to enhance it? Is it an inner experience or a state of transcendence? Is one conscious of its unfolding, or is it a remembered experience, to be relished after the event? In the course of these inquiries, Bharata expounds on the navarasas or nine sentiments—heroic, erotic, comic, marvellous, pathetic, odious, fearsome, furious and peaceful. He lists the ashtanayikas, or eight types of heroines, classified in accordance with their emotional state in relation to the nayaka or lover. He also enumerates the three categories of expression: nritta (dance based on pure rhythm), nritya (dance to a rhythm with mime) and natya (drama with music and dance). He specifies the hand

movements and postures that constitute the vocabulary of dance, and dwells at length on the bhavas, or emotions. He describes fifteen types of dramas, ranging from one-act to ten-act, and speaks of four types of acting—through gestures, speech, costumes and display of temperament—which he further classifies as either masculine and vigorous (tandava) or feminine and graceful (lasya). The *Natyashastra*, therefore, not only propounds 'a complex and coherent grammar of performance' but, through its preoccupation with rasa, also presents 'a comprehensive theory of cognition'[1] which is meant to take the artist and the audience to a higher level of consciousness.

A document of this nature could not have been written without an already well-established tradition for the discussion of art and aesthetics. In fact, historians say that the *Natyashastra* is based on the *Natyaveda*, a 36,000-shloka document, no longer extant, which is much older. The theory of rasa or aesthetic pleasure, which some scholars consider to be India's most significant contribution to the world of art, was further developed after Bharata by a series of commentators, most notably Bhatta Lollata and Sri Shankuka in the eighth century, Bhatta Nayaka in the tenth, and Abhinavagupta in the eleventh. Kapila Vatsyayan, the respected art historian who has written a learned book on the *Natyashastra*, argues convincingly that the text had a pivotal role in the making and evolution of Indian art right up to the eighteenth century.[2]

The essential inference is that art and creative expression in India have had a deeply deliberative and sophisticated tradition that is centuries' old. At a time when most other parts of the world had not yet fully developed a language to communicate, Indian thinkers had come up with a vision of aesthetics that encompassed every aspect of artistic endeavour. If they had merely put together a compendium of art, it would have been, for those times, achievement enough. But for them to have been absorbed with such depth and insight with what constitutes the *fulfilling* artistic experience, is astonishing. The basic tenets that they came up with, or debated, grew and evolved, but they always belonged to an overarching philosophical world view. If Bharata advanced a powerful theory of aesthetics, other areas of human thought and expression, both religious and secular, received as much intellectual attention. The ancient Vedas and Upanishads are among

the most acute meditations in human history on philosophy, metaphysics and the nature of reality. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, written around the fourth century AD, is a clinical exposition of the principles of statecraft; Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*, written possibly in the third century, is India's best-known treatise on the art of lovemaking and has—and this is not known to many—a very detailed account of the prevalent techniques of painting. Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, attributed to 400 years before Christ, is arguably the most scientific and detailed lexicon on grammar composed before the nineteenth century in any part of the world.

When culture in all its myriad aspects has such a lineage, it has the power to influence people over millennia, both within and without. The impact of Indian culture for over a thousand years in South and South-east Asia proves this, and must count as perhaps the world's only example in the ancient and medieval periods of significant cultural export without military conquest. From the sixth century BC onwards, the tenets of Buddhism were taken abroad in Pali, a dialect of Prakrit which, much simpler than Sanskrit, was what the masses spoke at that time. Pali is still the language of Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and much of South-east Asia. From the Amaravati period in the second century, through the Gupta, Pallava, Pala and Chola dynasties in the succeeding centuries up to the twelfth, Hindu culture spread across all of South and South-east Asia. The largest Hindu temple in the world, and one of only two dedicated to Brahma, is at Angkor Vat in Cambodia. The epic Ramayana has immensely popular local variations in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. The Champa dynasty, which ruled for over 1000 years in what is present-day central Vietnam, was Hindu and followed the cultural mores and practices of India, including the Sakya calendar. Tamil is an officially recognized language in Malaysia and Singapore, and in Thailand, which is predominantly Buddhist today, the names of people and places are derivates of Sanskrit. In fact, archaeological findings across the region, right up to the Philippines, show that Sanskrit, and its most important religious and secular texts, were part of local cultures. The Borobudur temple in Indonesia is a monumental example of the influence of Hindu philosophy and architectural principles; and Bali is still a Hindu enclave in this overwhelmingly Islamic nation. (It is also,

as I discovered on a recent visit, perhaps the only place in the world where a huge statue of Bhima dominates a city square.)

It is not the intention here to elaborate fully on every aspect of Indian culture, or discuss at length the footprint it created abroad. There is enough and easily accessible scholarship on both these aspects. The purpose is to provide some compelling examples that emphasize the central thesis of this chapter—that from its origins, Indian culture evolved in response to a clear thought process, and a great deal of scholarship within the framework of a distinct world view underpinned that evolution. Creativity, thus, had both context and ideology and wasn't rootless, random or passively *reactive* to external influences. If this strength allowed Indian culture to propagate itself abroad without the force of arms, it also allowed it to survive conquering armies at home. Throughout history invaders from across the Himalayas sought to either plunder or own India. The Greeks led by Alexander conquered the northernmost areas in the fourth century BC. Alexander's premature death prevented the consolidation of a lasting Greek kingdom, but a series of subsidiary Greek invasions continued for the next 400 years. In 57 BC the Sakas, a foreign tribe from Central Asia, also made their entry, albeit briefly. Greek influences were confidently assimilated by the indigenous culture, and the best manifestation of this can be seen in the stylized depiction of the Buddha in the Gandhara school of sculpture.

However, the most sustained challenge to the established culture of the land came when Islamic invaders swept into the subcontinent from Central Asia after the tenth century AD. The Muslims came to north India as conquerors and proselytizers. Their aim was to impose their religion *and* their customs and way of life on the local populace. Inevitably, a great deal of wanton destruction was inherent in this process. But because of its intrinsic strength, the indigenous culture could not only withstand the onslaught but also absorb elements from the culture of the conquerors. What followed, therefore, in the succeeding centuries, was a most remarkable phenomenon of cultural intermingling. As mentioned earlier, Hindu masons built mosques, palaces and mausoleums to Persian or Central Asian specifications but brought in designs and techniques that were local (Islamic conventions did not permit the depiction of human figures, but the ornamentation

was not immune to local influence). The ateliers of Muslim rulers, most notably the Mughal emperors, had Hindu artists producing miniatures that combined aspects of both traditions. Religious divides existed, of course, but in time there developed a powerful Sufi tradition which drew from the metaphysics of both Islam and Hinduism.

The poetry of Amir Khusro (1253–1325), composed in Persian and in the local dialect, Hindavi, and his music, which combined India's ancient musical traditions with those of Persia, best exemplifies this enriching synthesis of cultures. The sombre and reflective dhrupad tradition of Indian classical vocal music developed the seduction of the khayal form through the influence of the newcomers, while musical instruments from Central Asia were modified and added to the repertoire of India's classical and folk instrumental music. Persian and Arabic resonated with Khari Boli and other local dialects to ultimately produce a viable hybrid in the form of Urdu, which became the lingua franca of much of north India and beyond. Cuisine, too, underwent a transformation, resulting in a menu that brought biryani and halwa into Hindu homes and kachauris and kheer into Muslim homes. This intermingling happened gradually and organically, almost unconsciously, enriching both the conqueror and the conquered without diluting the authenticity of either.

However, unlike the Turks and Afghans, who came as invaders but made India their home and *became* Indian, the British neither desired to be nor were capable of being assimilated in India. Kipling's famous line about the east being the east and the west the west and 'ne'er the twain shall meet' was motivated by racial arrogance but wasn't entirely off the mark. The invaders from Central Asia and Afghanistan represented essentially a variant of the eastern ethos that was capable of finding a home in the accommodating soil of India. The British came from an industrially developed occidental culture, with plans for sustained and long-term plunder, and with no doubt whatsoever about where they belonged. Both Islam and Christianity were proselytizing religions, but while the Muslim rulers allowed for their cultural attributes—cuisine, music, language, dress, custom and aesthetics—to blend into the weave of Indian life, the British were made of an entirely different fabric. They stayed in India but lived separately, in the Civil Lines away from the historic city, pervasive but

aloof, seeking to create Indians in their image for functional reasons but never wanting to lose their separate identity. While some kind of assimilation did take place in the very early years of their rule, when a handful of British officers went native, it was short-lived, and soon an evangelical spirit that celebrated the separate and superior culture of the rulers and looked down with sustained contempt upon the natives became the norm. Some Indians learnt English, and thought themselves more British than Indian, and some aspects of Indian life rubbed off on the British, but essentially this was the interaction of two fundamentally separate civilizations. To say this is not to purvey Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations, but to understand that some cultures can be different enough to make genuine synthesis based on a principle of equality impossible.

~

As rulers the British could project their conviction about the inherent superiority of their own culture relentlessly and effectively. The initial respect for the culture of the ruled by people like William Jones dissipated quite fast, and was replaced by a combination of curiosity and hostility. The curiosity was central to the insatiable desire to catalogue, categorize, examine, assess, analyse, gazette and objectify the 'other'; the hostility was essential to sustain the sense of superiority and provide ideological legitimacy for colonial rule. Caste, community, tribe, family, texts, physiognomy, dress, behaviour, antiquity, even complexion and facial features, were carefully observed, classified and recorded. In the name of scientific precision, an entire people were dehumanized. A good example of this kind of study is the eight-volume work entitled *The People of India*—'A series of photographic illustrations, with descriptive letterpress, of the races and tribes of Hindustan, originally prepared under the authority of the Government of India'. Edited by J. Forbes Watson and John William Kaye, the complete set was published between 1868 and 1875 and contained over 460 photographs of people from different Indian castes and 'races'. In almost every photograph, except perhaps of those from social groups that had aligned with the British or were politically and economically useful, the men, women and children are presented as

trapped or drugged animals being catalogued for a science project. There is no social or cultural context and no room for individuality or nuance. Some of the images recall photographs of convicts taken for police records.

The text accompanying the photographs is obvious colonial prejudice dressed up as science and scholarship. Of the 'Dyers' (those engaged in the profession of dyeing cloth) the editors write: 'They have in many localities a reputation for intemperance, and it is certain that the use of ardent spirits is not forbidden to them; and they have, too, an indifferent character for morality.' The 'Bunneas' are 'very illiterate, and care to know only what they must know' and 'being by reputation, and in fact, arrant cowards, they resort to the coward's only protection—submission—until opportunity comes for retaliation'. But the banias find some good words, too, for being loyal to the British: 'In native states they were often plundered, by exactions, and are still . . . In our own territory some of them have become millionaires . . . and are one at least, of the classes of India, who gratefully acknowledge the protection they receive.' The 'Baories' or bird catchers—'no doubt remnants of aboriginal tribes' who 'do good service to English sportsmen'—are described as 'very poor, and though they occasionally get a good deal of money, they spend it in drink, or in feasts to their caste fellows, which are sad orgies of gluttony and drunkenness'. Writing of the Sansi tribe as one of the 'wandering classes of India [that] continue to prey upon its population as they have ever done . . . unless they are forcibly restrained by our Government', the editors note that 'the Sanseeas [are] totally ignorant of everything but their hereditary crime . . . When they are not engaged in acts of crime they are beggars, assuming various religious forms, or affecting the most abject poverty. Their women and children have the true whine of the professional mendicant as they frequent thronged bazaars, receiving charity and stealing what they can . . . They have not the slightest compunction in committing murder, but they do not commit it from motives of revenge, only in the exercise of their hereditary calling . . . They are, as a class, in a condition of miserable poverty, living from hand to mouth, idle, disreputable, restless, without any settled homes, and . . . no distinct language of their own.'

Most revealing, in this work commissioned and produced shortly

after the 1857 'mutiny', are the contrasting descriptions of the Jats and the Gujjars. The former are very favourably, if condescendingly, assessed, and it soon becomes clear why:

> All records of the Jats describe them as a fine, manly race of men, frank and true in all their relations . . . They enter into the regular military service of our Government, and make good steady soldiers, both in the infantry and the cavalry. In the rebellion of the year 1857, the Jat population did not join in local excesses like the Goojurs, the Wattees, and other tribes; but were loyal, and decidedly on the side of order. The 14th Bengal cavalry is composed solely of Jats, and did excellent service throughout that eventful period, without the faintest suspicion of disloyalty; and, if they had been needed, the tribe in general were ready to assist the British Government to the utmost of its power.

While commending the Jats for their virile and loyal ways, the editors also write approvingly of them because they 'marry only one wife, for the most part' and are the 'best agriculturists in Northern India' who 'plough and clean their fields efficiently; they understand the rotation of crops; and their agricultural implements, if rude in form, are efficient for all purposes'. They are also 'excellent cart drivers'.

In contrast, of the Gujjars Watson and Kaye write:

> They are dishonest, untrustworthy, and lawless in a high degree; and require constant and unremitting supervision. They are notorious and successful cattle lifters . . . The notorious conduct of the Goojurs about Meerut and Delhi, in 1857, has been before noticed. They suffered sharply for it, many of their worst leaders having been tried and hanged, or transported for life; but it is questionable whether this has had any permanent effect upon the class in general, who would be ready to resort to plunder on any favourable occasion.

Comparing the Jats and the Gujjars, Watson and Kaye note:

> In many respects the Goojurs resemble the Jats. They are indeed a handsome tribe, and both men and women are remarkable for powerful figures and fair complexions . . . [but] while the Jats are honest, frank, and trustworthy in all respects, the Goojurs are lawless, mulish, revengeful, and wrong-headed, professing no loyalty to any one. Thus, by the relative character of the tribe, one has reached the dignity of an independent state for the largest proportion of its members . . . while the other has remained in its original condition, distracted by small feuds, man against man, and village against village, thus preventing any cohesion for a common purpose . . . Like the Jats they eat all flesh, except that of cows or bullocks, and are particularly fond of wild hog. They drink spirits also, and smoke tobacco and ganja, or hemp leaves, and their women use opium as well for themselves as their children. The Goojurs are by no means so thrifty or so rich as the Jats, which may be accounted for by their differences in character, nor are they by any means so industrious. They live in a poorer class of dwellings, and the clothes and ornaments of their women and children are of an inferior character, nor do they take employment like the Jats; they probably cannot obtain it on account of their indifferent character.

Every single tribe and 'race' was presented, in this catalogue, as primitive—if not savage, then simple. Naturally, they could only have 'hereditary' faults, habits, addictions, modest talents (if any) and 'rude implements' but certainly no culture, no refinement. Lord and Lady Canning, to whom the eight volumes of *The People of India* were ceremonially presented, were appreciative of this vast 'anthropological' enterprise, but the discerning Indians who saw the volumes were aghast. Inevitably, though, some of them, especially of the elite, despite their outrage at the ethnographic insult, became defensive about their society and culture. Syed Mahmud Khan, son of the prominent nineteenth-century reformer and educationist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, was researching Islamic history at the India Office Library in London when he saw the first two volumes of *The People of India*. These contained photographs of tribal people, the lower castes and the so-called 'criminal tribes'. The decontextualized, exhibit-like images shocked him and he felt deeply insulted. When an Englishman asked him if he was 'Hindustani', he replied proudly and defiantly that he was, but in a low voice added that he was 'not an aborigine', that his

ancestors had come to India from a foreign country.[3] Later, his father, the great Sir Syed Ahmed, reacting to the same photographs and text, wrote that unless 'Hindustanis remove this blot [Indians as naked savages] they shall never be held in honour by any civilized race'.[4]

The project of documenting and dehumanizing the natives continued into the twentieth century. The British ethnographer and civil servant Herbert Risley, in charge of the 1901 Indian census, came up with the amazing theory that castes could be distinguished in accordance with the average nasal index—'those with the finest nose will be at the top, and those with the coarsest at the bottom'. Risley's essential thesis was that 'the genius of Empire in India has come to her from the West', and that as foreign conquerors (read Greeks and Scythians, in particular) made the mistake of mixing with the indigenous people, there occurred a racial degeneration that was irreversible, and 'India's people, even though Aryan in origin, had now to remain forever distinct, different, and inevitably inferior'.[5]

This racial prejudice was particularly marked in the areas of creative expression. In the beginning the disdain was based on the sheer difference between the two cultures. Ralph Fitch, Queen Elizabeth's envoy to Akbar in 1584, was appalled to see Hindu idols, describing them as 'blacke and evell favoured, their mouths monstrous, their eares gilded and full of jewels'. Later, a definitive theory was built to support this animosity. Indian aesthetics, it was argued, had no claim to distinction or greatness except for those elements that had come to India from outside. In particular, Greek influence, the consequence of Alexander's brief invasion of the Punjab in 326 BC, and represented by the art of Gandhara, was touted to be far superior to anything produced in India itself. Alexander Cunningham, the first British Director of Archaeology, wrote extensively about the pivotal role of Greece in inspiring the best in Indian art; the historian Vincent Smith, whose books I studied in school, argued that Gandhara was vastly superior to the Mathura school; and Lord Curzon, in his speech at the Asiatic Society in February 1900, pronounced that the majority of Indian antiquities were 'exotics, imported into the country in the train of conquerors, who had learnt their architectural lessons in Persia, in Central Asia, in Arabia, in Afghanistan'.[6]

The interesting fact is that such sweeping denunciations were also

based on supposedly widespread field studies and research. For instance, W. Erskine published a scholarly treatise on the cave temples at Ellora, and acquired sufficient knowledge of Hindu iconography to correctly identify the three faces of Shiva in the statue of Maheshamurthi. But he still felt that 'the execution and finishing of the figures in general . . . are often very defective, in no instance being possessed of striking excellence. The figures have something of rudeness and want of finish, the proportions are sometimes lost, the attitudes forced, and everything indicates the infancy of art.'[7] Such 'scholarly' denunciations emboldened later critics to be bluntly dismissive. George Birdwood, widely regarded as one of the most influential art critics in late nineteenth-century Britain, once compared an exquisite Gupta period image of the Buddha to a 'boiled svet pudding', and came to the conclusion that in seventy-eight years of study of art he had not come across anything in India that gave expression to 'the good, the beautiful and the true'.[8]

Birdwood also wrote in 1910 that 'sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India'. Such an astounding statement, rubbishing centuries of achievement as seen, for instance, in the exquisite Chola bronzes, had the backing of historians like Vincent Smith, who wrote condescendingly in 1889 that the Ajanta murals did not compare favourably 'with the world's masterpieces—no Indian art work does—but they are entitled to a respectable place among the second or third class'.[9] Other art forms, like music and dance, came under hostile scrutiny too. Most British observers mistook all forms of classical dance to be a variation either of the 'nautch' or an extension of the devadasi system, 'depraved' and barely distinguishable from prostitution. Indian classical music represented such a stark contrast to western musical traditions that it provoked hardly any appreciation or patronage, and the soulful elaboration of the raga was curtly dismissed by one Englishman as little better than a 'sleepy lullaby'. Apart from the colonial imperative to show that the people they ruled were undeveloped in their creative expressions, there was, as the historian Partha Mitter writes, a genuine gap in comprehension between two alien cultures: 'Nowhere can this clash of the two essentially different, even antithetical, cultural and aesthetic values be better studied than in European interpretations of Hindu sculpture, painting and architecture.'[10]

The reason why colonialism was such a deeply dislocating event was that its sustained critique was *internalized* by its victims. Since the denigration came from the rulers, it found effortless projection and no organized opposition; the entire paraphernalia of the state—including the educational institutions and curriculum and English as the officially sponsored and imposed medium of instruction—was available to disseminate it and give it sanctity. Moreover, the denunciation came with the tag of scholarship, wherein obvious colonial bias was camouflaged with extensive field studies and tomes of data. The colonial historians and arbiters of art did not purport to give off-the-cuff opinions, they did not pronounce their verdict as one-line imperial dictates; their dismissal wore the garb of study and research and 'comparative' analysis. The tragedy was that the local populace, more often than not, accepted this denigration; books on Indian art and architecture authored by British historians were standard texts in Indian schools till many years after 1947. This entire body of one-sided criticism and dismissal seeped into the mentality of educated Indians and, in particular, the elite.

The degree to which this unrelenting critique succeeded in influencing Indians can be gauged from the writings of a foreign observer, a remarkably observant Englishman. Ernest Beinfield Havell was the principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta. He had worked with Abanindranath Tagore and written books on Indian sculpture and painting, on Benares and on the principles of Indian art. In 1912, he penned a strongly worded polemic on how British rule had subverted the artistic traditions of India, severing the Indian educated classes from their cultural roots and reducing them to little more than mindless mimics of Western fashions and mores.[11] His observations need careful study, and are cited here in some detail because they have the objectivity and clarity of someone who was knowledgeable about Indian art but, as a sympathetic observer, could see the havoc wrought to Indian sensibilities. 'It is because the Anglo-Indian educational system has no ideal beyond that of imparting to Indian students the intellectual impressions of Oxford, Cambridge, Aberdeen and London, that it has failed to stimulate a real intellectual life in Indian Universities,' he protested. In the process, 'India has lost self-respect and self-reliance; pride in her own artistic culture and faith in her spiritual

mission. She . . . barters her birthright for a mess of pottage. Her young men, trained in Anglo-Indian schools and colleges, go to Europe with their artistic powers totally undeveloped . . . They come back to India . . . unable to understand either European art or Indian, and their only anxiety is to be considered fashionable and up-to-date.'

Havell noticed 'a curious want of discrimination in wealthy and aristocratic Indians, who in the intimate domestic life still kept up more or less Indian artistic traditions, but kept one part of their home in a quasi-European fashion'. 'It is this want of pride and want of faith in their own traditional culture on the part of the upper classes of India,' he noticed, 'which has been much more destructive to Indian art than the ignorance or indifference of Europeans.' Nothing, he argued, was more intellectually depressing than the sense of 'constitutional inferiority' that seemed to have possessed Indians. 'The surrender of all their artistic traditions, which so many educated Indians have been content to make is an intellectual and moral loss for which all European science and literature cannot compensate them, nor will the fullest measure of political liberty . . . restore to them what they lose by that surrender.' The great scourge eating into the creative faculties of educated Indians was the inclination to mimic European artistic traditions. This imitative faculty, Havell argued, was encouraged by the British educational system. 'Anglo-Indian education being imitative cannot be of any use to Indian art. The fact that Indian art has been totally ignored in the Anglo-Indian scheme of education has tended to hasten its decay only because it has on that account led English educated Indians to regard it with indifference.'

There was a genuine sense of outrage in Havell's remarks, and his overriding motivation was to jolt the Indian elite out of their colonized sensibilities. 'Let your homes,' he argued, 'be built by Indian master builders schooled in the Shilpa-Shastras; let the furniture in your houses be of Indian design; let the teachings of the epics be taught to children and painted, as in the past, on the walls of schools and buildings; let the old chitrashalas be revived and patronized by the rich and the powerful.' He was exasperated by the proclivity of English-educated Indians to present to their European guests 'no higher domestic ideal than that of a London boarding house, and speak of their fellow countrymen who keep to the Indian tradition of

domestic life as "jungly" folk'. Being at the helm of a leading educational institution, he interacted with those who were the principal beneficiaries of British education, and could see—with the objectivity that only a foreign observer could have—how far they were adrift from the animating spirit of their own cultural ethos. 'Indians will certainly gain immensely, not only morally and intellectually but also politically,' he stressed, 'by ceasing to imitate European fashions indiscriminately, for this very lack of discrimination which educated Indians have shown discredits them in the eyes of Europe . . . As long as their chief ambition is to become successful imitators of what Europe does, they will remain in a state of political inferiority—and rightly so, for indiscriminate imitation is an admission of inferiority which inevitably depreciates the power of initiative and prevents the development of all the creative faculties.'

Havell's observations show emphatically how a culture which for over two millennia had evolved a comprehensive paradigm encompassing all aspects of creative expression, and which, after the tenth century AD, was part of a remarkably successful synthesis with elements of Islamic culture, was now systematically rubbished by the colonial rulers and, as a consequence, devalued by its own legatees. A foundational distortion then crept in, wherein culture was no longer harnessed to the present as part of normal evolution, but was viewed through the prism of the colonizing power. Often it was used to reinforce an image of India in conformity with what the 'superior' colonizer said. Sometimes, as part of nationalist discourse, it was overglorified to generate esteem and as compensation for what had been lost during subjugation. In such situations, historical memory becomes episodic, the intervening periods blanketed in a haze of collective amnesia. For the colonized, the past does not have a benevolent, easily accessible continuum with the present. It becomes a template for either denial or rejection or overemphasis, and this disequilibrium continues much after the rulers have left.

The manner in which the image of Krishna in his manifestation as the divine lover was sanitized provides an excellent illustration of this

phenomenon. In Hindu mythology, Krishna is regarded as the purna avatara, the complete incarnation, because he incorporates within himself all the sixteen attributes of human refinement, including the erotic—the sringara rasa. His role as the divine lover is in sync with the four highest purusharthas or goals of life enjoined in the Hindu world view: dharma (right conduct), artha (the pursuit of material well-being), kama (the pursuit of desire) and moksha (salvation). If Krishna's romantic dalliance as a boy with Radha and the gopis of Vrindavan is a validation of kama, his conduct as the Pandavas' adviser in the *Mahabharata* is a validation of artha; and in the Gita-upadesha—his sermon to Arjuna on selfless duty—he is the personification of dharma. The sringara rasa, therefore, is only one aspect of a many-splendoured personality that exemplifies the ideal life. Those who view the *Kamasutra* as only a compilation of impossible sexual postures forget that its first chapter is an extraordinary dialogue between Vatsyayana and an imaginary interlocutor who questions him on the need for such a text. Vatsyayana's reply is that since desire is also a manifestation of the divine, it is incumbent upon human beings to strive to be accomplished lovers, so that they can derive maximum pleasure from this gift; however, he adds, the key is to maintain the right balance between dharma, artha and kama, for if each is pursued in proportion and none in exclusion, an individual will ultimately achieve moksha. The concept of Krishna as lover was part of such an integrated, pragmatic and balanced world view, linking the sacred and the profane in a joyous celebration of life. It was certainly not evidence of some primitive hedonism or mindless carnality.

The British, however, viewed the entire lore of Krishna the lover with either ridicule or disgust. By the mid-nineteenth century the British, weaned on the evangelical fervour of Charles Grant and William Wilberforce and the utilitarian credo of the Mills brothers, were emphatic in their assessment of India as the dark land of heathens wallowing in immorality and evil. Considerable attention was devoted to juxtaposing the Christian ethic and value system with the 'depraved' moral fibre of the native. The Hindus, to them, were 'tied to hateful, horrible beliefs and customs—unmentionable thoughts'. Their world of darkness was filled with 'lust' and their culture had no 'moral codes—tolerating both polyandry and polygamy and

countenancing the greatest sensuousness'. Their form of worship was 'to a very large extent disgusting and even immoral', and the Hindu himself suffered from 'unparalleled sexual degradation'. In the eyes of the Christian Literary Society of Madras, Krishna, quite simply, was an adulterer and fornicator. In fact, in 1862, Sir Mathew Sausse, a British judge of the Bombay High Court, pronounced a judgement in which he saw the enactment of Krishna's dance with the gopis—the raas-leela—as only a means of encouraging adultery: 'All songs connected with the worship of Krishna which were brought before us, were of an amorous character . . . In these songs as well as stories both written and traditional, which later are treated as of a religious character, the subject of sexual intercourse is most prominent. Adultery is made familiar to the minds of all; it is nowhere discouraged or denounced, but on the contrary, in some stories, those persons who have committed that great moral and social offence are commended.'[12]

The Hindu revivalist movements of the nineteenth century, of which the most important were the Brahmo Samaj (founded by Raja Rammohan Roy in 1830) and the Arya Samaj (founded by Dayanand Saraswati in 1875), were motivated by noble intentions: to cleanse India's social and religious legacy of the many distortions that had crept into it over centuries. But in doing so, they sought also to gain 'respectability' in the eyes of the British and 'raise' themselves to better absorb the new ideas of science and liberalism represented by the colonizer. Hence, the thrust of their reforming endeavours was to jettison from their collective religious heritage any and all elements that were likely to invite criticism from an Anglo-Christian perspective. The entire tradition of Krishna as the lover became a victim of such a perception. His legacy had to be sanitized of all erotic connotations. Sringara rasa had to be interpreted as an aberration. The enlightened acceptance of kama as an aspect of the divine was looked upon as a misguided deviation. The fig leaf of glib spirituality had to be quickly put in place to cover centuries of 'moral turpitude'. Thus Krishna did not enact the raas-leela with the gopis in the groves of Vrindavan; the rasa was merely *symbolic* of the search of the Atma for the Brahman. Radha's passion was nothing other than the intense longing of the soul for union with the Absolute. Of course, Krishna's lore allows also for such allegorical interpretations. But the oversimplification occurred

because such an interpretation was postulated as the only valid one. In the process, the carefully evolved balance that recognized the divine in all aspects of human existence, including in the pursuit of desire and pleasure, was clumsily distorted. In one of the more ironic instances of trans-cultural transplants, Victorian morality was made the touchstone for interpreting the divine romance and passion of Radha and Krishna. (It is interesting to speculate whether the extremely puritanical streak in Mahatma Gandhi's approach to sex was a result of this Victorian critique.)

Even those imbued with a fierce nationalistic spirit often found it difficult to escape the connection between patriotism, the colonial experience and the need to exorcise some aspect of the past. The British consistently derided their Indian subjects for being too effeminate. The historian Robert Orme proclaimed, soon after the East India Company arrived in India, that the Hindu is 'the most effeminate inhabitant of the globe'. The dhoti worn by Bengali men was dismissed as a woman's dress; Indian men were described as completely lacking 'manly self-control' (their diet, of which rice was a major part, was considered one possible reason for this affliction). Baden-Powell, who founded the Scout Movement in 1908, and who is uncritically valorized by many military-minded Indian men to this day, was convinced that Indian boys needed a strong muscular infusion, for they were 'singularly without character by nature', and bereft of any notion of self-discipline or honour. A classic example showing how this critique was internalized even by individuals who were otherwise the proponents of a virile nationalism can be seen in the reaction of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–96) to the lyrical genius of Jayadeva's Sanskrit classic *Gitagovinda*: 'From the beginning to the end,' Bankim lamented, 'it does not contain a single expression of manly feeling—of womanly feelings there is a great deal . . . I do not deny his high poetical merits in a certain sense of exquisite imagery . . . but that does not make him less the poet of an effeminate and sensual race.'[13]

Chatterjee's reaction was understandable given his direct proximity to the colonial experience. But the stereotypes created out of such an interaction live on long after the formal ending of colonial rule, both among the rulers and the ruled. That the notion of a sinister sensuality underpinning Indian society was the leitmotif of E.M. Forster's *A*

Passage to India, published in 1924, is not surprising, but it is also central to the pivotal opening incident in Paul Scott's *Jewel in the Crown*, published in 1966. And in the India of today, rightist extremists, who pride themselves on their commitment to restoring India's glorious past, have become Victorian custodians of morality, protesting any display of public affection and denying the legacy of the *Kamasutra*, the Khajuraho temples and Krishna's glorious play with the gopis on the banks of the Yamuna.

Soon after the consolidation of British rule in the second half of the eighteenth century, there was a great demand for lifelike images of the 'natives' and their exotic culture for the viewing pleasure of friends and family back home. Initially this demand was met by a select group of British artists who travelled to India to paint its people, monuments and scenery. William Hodges visited India over 1780–83 and released his *Select Views of India* in 1787; he was followed by the uncle and nephew duo of Thomas and William Daniell, who produced the celebrated six-volume series of aquatints, *Oriental Scenery*. Other significant landscape and portrait artists included William Simpson, Edward Lear, Emily Eden, Tilly Kettle, John Zoffany, Robert Home and George Chinnery. The works of these artists fuelled a growing curiosity in Britain, and to cope with this demand a need was felt to develop an atelier of Indian artists who could paint in the same genre and style as their masters. Indian artists were available for hire; they were in need of money because of the reduced patronage from members of the Indian royalty, who were, expectedly, more attracted to the British artists. Thus was created the Company School of Painting, wherein a great many Indian painters adjusted their own tradition and training to adopt the style and technique favoured by the British. At the behest of their colonial patrons and the occasional Indian royal, they produced, from about the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, a large body of work about themselves—their monuments, people, costumes, festivals, occupations, nautch girls, crafts et al.—but in a style that was alien and for the needs of a foreign audience.

This was the first 'oscillation', a movement away from the artistic

continuity that would have unfolded in normal circumstances. The Company School is not without merit, but it was an imposition, an artificial construct that was not the result of synthesis or of normal creative evolution, and, therefore, the *process* that it entailed needs to be analysed. When people are the subjects of their own culture, their creative expression has self-assuredness and spontaneity, so they create a unique and effective language of communication even when the grammar is imperfect. This is because the idiom is authentic. But when people become objects of a foreign culture, a huge transformation takes place. Suddenly, a creative work is judged not for its intrinsic value, or for the heritage it is sourced from and is a part of, but for the degree to which it is comprehensible and conforms to the outsider's culture. The process is all the more mutilating if the outsider belongs to the dominant political or military power of the time, and there is necessarily prejudice, condescension and prurience in his gaze. When this happens, spontaneity reduces itself to self-conscious mediocrity; creativity seeks to qualify itself; authenticity gives way to imitation; self-assurance is replaced by denial. An entire culture attempts to reinterpret itself in terms that will somehow win the dominant outsider's approval. The 'objectified' people then thrive only as exotica; their historic role becomes that of the observed; everything external about them—and nothing of intrinsic value—is collated, classified and investigated. They finally end up as caricatures, divorced from their own cultural milieu and perpetually alien—in spite of their best efforts at emulation—to that of the outsider.

This interruption of natural artistic evolution, this 'oscillation', is verifiable—the imposition of British preference did not, after all, take place on a blank template. The painted pottery of the Indus Valley dates back to 3000 BC, and reveals an already developed sense of line and colour. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten coined the word 'aesthetics' in 1735 but as we have seen, about two thousand years earlier, the *Natyashastra* had analysed the structure of aesthetics and the rasa or emotions it produced. In the specific area of painting, several ancient Indian texts exist. The *Vishnudharmottara*, written in the second century AD, is a detailed treatise on the rules of painting, including the choice of materials, techniques and colours. The emphasis, even at this early stage, is on how the depiction needs to bring out the inner essence

rather than merely a physical representation. Thus, specific colours are recommended to evoke the different moods or rasas: white for comic (hasya), dark blue for sensual (sringara), red for anger (rudra), black for fearful (bhayanaka), grey for compassion (karuna), yellowish white for heroic (vira) and yellow for marvel and awe (adbhuta). Bhittichitra, the art of making paintings on walls, was common throughout the ancient period, and the frescoes and murals of Ajanta—representing the apogee of this tradition—were made during the rule of the Guptas in the fifth and sixth centuries. Evidence that this tradition continued can be seen in the Ellora paintings of the eighth and tenth centuries, and in the medieval era murals in the palaces of Kerala and Rajputana and the Jain temples of Gujarat.

A new element was added to this repertoire with the coming of the Mughals. In the sixteenth century Emperor Akbar set up an imperial atelier, inviting the best artists from all over India to his court. In time, this royal patronage produced a fusion of Indian and Persian art that consolidated itself under the rule of his successors, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The Mughal artistic oeuvre was extensive, and included paintings of flora and fauna, landscapes, portraits and illustrated manuscripts. Some of the best works were in the miniature style, which spread from the Mughal court to the kingdoms of Rajasthan and those in the Himalayan foothills. The themes of these artists were from their own milieu and history: a great many of the works dealt with the romance of Radha and Krishna, but collections on other subjects, such as the classical ragas—the raagmala miniatures—or the changing seasons—the barahmasas—were equally significant.

The imposition of British artistic requirements has to be seen in this context, in order to understand the exact nature of the rupture in tradition and cultural evolution. Unable, and unwilling, to consider any world view other than their own, the British could not understand that the artists who painted the murals of Ajanta were less concerned with the exact physical representation of a form than with the inner spirit animating it. Their verdict, then, was that Indians could not draw well enough and needed to be trained. There was no question of providing patronage to existing artistic skills; the exclusive focus was on replacing them with the prevalent European art traditions. When, therefore, William Dalrymple says that 'Mughal technique, rendered with English watercolour on English paper, produced the Company School of Art'[14], one is frankly mystified. His assessment casually sanitizes the colonial project, making it out to be an exchange between equals, thus adding to the current trend towards revisionism that catalogues the glories of the Empire and presents colonial policies as either enlightened intervention or imperial benevolence. India had, over centuries, absorbed myriads of external influences, but this interaction with the British was different because it was based not on dialogue but on dictate, on rejection rather than interaction, thereby obliterating the possibility of a synthesis that would enrich both cultures. As Shakti Maira, the erudite art historian, says: 'Till British colonization, Indian art . . . had its phases, movements and developments. There was a reshaping by patrons, as happened in the Mughal period, with their preference for a more religiously appropriate, non-figurative, more floral or more Persian art, yet this seems to have added to the range of art made in India. Rather than uproot or replace earlier or non-Islamic art, something was added. Temples and a wide range of art continued that showed no crisis of confidence that it was inferior, primitive, unskilled, un-progressive or banal. All this happened with the British, and the contemporary art scene has still not completely recovered from the lack of self-worth that came from what happened to India at that time.'[15]

If the Company School wrenched artists away from their themes and techniques to create an entire generation of 'visual clerks', the formal art schools set up in Bombay and Calcutta in the mid-nineteenth century set out to train Indian artists in the 'Royal Academy' style of painting. The J.J. School of Art, named after the first Indian to be conferred a Baronetcy, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejebhoy, who provided the school an initial grant of Rs 1,00,000, was founded in March 1857. Lockwood Kipling was its first principal, and his son, the writer Rudyard Kipling, was born on the campus. The Government School of Art in Calcutta was founded in 1864, with H.H. Locke as its first principal. A generation of painters graduated from these schools, having learnt from British academicians about the superior principles of European art. The evangelical purpose of 'upgrading' Indian artists so that they could conform to and be inspired by European standards was never in doubt. The J.J. School in its first annual report spoke of

the tendency of Indian artists 'to repeat traditional compositions which have come down to them from a distant age without refreshing or even glancing at real life. Hence they degenerate instead of improving. The grotesque images with the shapes of men and animals in all parts of the Hindu temple are irredeemably bad. Their sculptured foliage is purely abstract in character. It seems that the safest way of attempting to regenerate this defective and artificial manner of design without destroying what it has inherited from European schools of art is to set the student to copy faithfully the objects of nature, men and women.' And then comes the classic, supremely arrogant statement of the benevolence of Empire: 'Thus a school of design would in time arise, native in the best sense, owing its sense of accuracy, truth, and natural beauty to European inspiration but moulding its material into purely Indian types.'

The Bengal School of the late nineteenth century was born as a reaction to this manifest colonial bias in art, and marked the second 'oscillation', this time in the opposite direction, towards pre-colonial artistic traditions. The movement began under the patronage of E.B. Havell, the principal of the Calcutta Art College from 1896 to 1905. Havell, as we have discussed earlier, was convinced about the need for Indians to go back to their own tradition. With Abanindranath Tagore, a cousin of Rabindranath Tagore, whom he had appointed as the vice principal, he set about clearing the college of its copies of mediocre European pictures and plaster casts of Greek models. The revivalist ideology of the Bengal School was greatly influenced by the philosophy and heritage of India's past, and drew inspiration from the Hindu epics, the Ajanta frescoes and Mughal and Rajput miniatures. It was a conscious effort to set the clock back, and support came from unexpected quarters. A group of Japanese painters who visited Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century, of whom the most prominent was Kakuzo Okakura, added their opposition to the mindless imitation of the west, and gave demonstrations on how to paint on silk and paper in the style of Ajanta.

It is a commentary on the contradictions that colonialism creates that the high-minded intentions of the Bengal School did not have universal support among Indians themselves. In fact, the students of the Calcutta College went on strike and the local press was equally critical, condemning any invocation of India's past in preference to

western 'modernity' as retrogressive. This ideological confusion—wherein what is western is considered relevant even if it is alien, and what is indigenous is perceived as irrelevant—is among the most insidious consequences of colonialism. Of course, any attempt at revivalism has a tendency to be extreme, and some of the criticism of Abanindranath and his devoted followers was not entirely off the mark. Mukul Dey, the learned art critic, and principal of the Government College at Calcutta in the 1960s, rightly points out that the Bengal School artists 'were in the beginning somewhat afraid of modern life, lest they should be drawn merely into imitative representation. This led them to avoid landscapes or portraits, the representation of present day objects or events, so their work remained somewhat artificial, in the sense that it was not the outcome of their own actual experiences, but rather of a dreamland which they made real by giving it colour and form . . . Painting was found to be the best medium for expressing this dream life of theirs, and so the first group of Abanindranath's disciples completely neglected other mediums of art such as sculpture, architecture, or means of reproduction like lithography, woodcut, etching etc. Oil paintings were also disliked as being too decidedly European.'

The puritanical awkwardness of the Bengal School mellowed in time; artists like Nandalal Bose and Jamini Roy dexterously dipped into the folk idiom and created works that had considerable aesthetic appeal without the straitjacketed approach and self-consciousness of the early years. But the deliberate glorification of a pre-colonial past was bound to create its own antibodies. The third 'oscillation' took place when leading painters in many parts of the country rebelled against both the revivalism of the Bengal School and the 'Royal Academy' style taught in the government art colleges. This led to the Progressive Artists Group (PAG), founded in 1947 by F.N. Souza, K.H. Ara and S.H. Raza, and included M.F. Husain, H.A. Gade and S.K. Bakre. They were all young men then, the youngest twenty-four, the oldest thirty-five, and were expectedly irreverent in stating their credo. They wanted, so they proclaimed, to 'paint with absolute freedom for content and technique, almost anarchic, save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental and eternal laws, of aesthetic order, plastic coordination and colour composition'. This revolutionary

restatement of artistic ideals had an enduring impact, but the PAG itself fell apart quite quickly. In 1950, just three years after it was formed, two of the founding members, Souza and Raza, bid farewell to the group: the former left for London, the latter for Paris. Some others, like V.S. Gaitonde, Krishan Khanna and Mohan Samant, joined the PAG, but the group was finally disbanded in 1956. Thereafter, 'Group 1890', formed in 1962 in Delhi, and the artists of the Cholamandal village, set up near Chennai in 1964, continued the rebellion. J. Swaminathan, who was the chief spokesman of Group 1890, proclaimed, 'We reject the . . . pastoral idealism of the Bengal School . . . and the imposition of concepts evolved by successive movements in modern European art.' The artists of the Cholamandal village in their first manifesto lamented that 'what passes for Indian art in many quarters here is, at best, an almost sterile Indian version of a European way of expression. It still lacks vital Indian inspiration which alone can ultimately fuse the apparent contradictions into an acceptable pattern.'

The three 'oscillations' in Indian art since the arrival of the British were a direct consequence of colonial distortion. For over 150 years Indian art was only about *reaction*, not about normal evolutionary progression. The latter was a luxury only the colonizing power could enjoy. Within that evolutionary progression there could be radical changes, such as, for instance, Dadaism, Cubism and the entire corpus of the European avant garde, but these changes came from stimuli within, not as a reaction to what was imposed from outside. The contrast with the options available to the colonized is stark: Indian artists had little option but to suppress their natural artistic heritage to conform to the requirement of the Company School; the well-meaning pioneers of the Bengal School could think of little else than to try and eliminate that colonial imposition by blindly reverting to the past; and the imperative before Souza and others like him was only to rebel against both the imposition of colonial techniques and an uncritically resurrected past. The Indian masters of the Company School who painted market scenes and religious fairs and processions and made life-like images of barbers and ironsmiths and weavers to satisfy the curiosity of foreigners, were caricaturing themselves against their will. The Bengal artists who were reluctant to experiment with anything

that was not an element of their glorified past were, by the very acceptance of this limitation, caricaturing their potential. And the Progressive Artists in Bombay, seeking the anarchic freedom of the unconditioned, were, in the very process of denying their past, unknowingly caricaturing their rebellious vision of the future. In fact, all the artists of the PAG and similar post-Independence groups, and in particular the firebrand Souza, were heavily and unnaturally influenced by European modernism, leading the art critic John Bergman to comment that Souza 'straddles many traditions but serves none'.

The impact of colonialism on a people's sensibilities does not disappear with political freedom. The Empire continues to exercise its sway at the psychological level. The formerly ruled deny this, and yet their mental servitude is apparent in so many ways, including in their reactions to the west: excessive outrage at any criticism and a disproportionate sense of validation at the slightest praise. The musical genius of Ravi Shankar became real for most Indians only when he was fêted in Europe and America and the Beatles came to hobnob with him. Ravi Shankar himself considered this to be a most befitting recognition, and has spent much of his life in the west. Satyajit Ray became an Indian icon only after he was recognized in the west as a legend of world cinema.

Undoubtedly, there has been, in the last six decades, some attempt at reappropriation of cultural space. But the overall picture leaves much to be desired. We still haven't developed the kind of confidence in our culture that would enable us to see it as a defining part of our personal *and* our national life. The result is neglect and shoddiness. In spite of the very early attention given to culture after 1947,[16] the infrastructure for it is still woefully inadequate. There are few, if any, world-class auditoriums and conference centres, and those that exist are mostly in poor condition. New Delhi, the capital of the republic, has only one auditorium of more than 2000 capacity, the Siri Fort, and it is in a deplorable condition; the interiors are musty, and no one seems to care that the stage and light equipment is horribly out of date. I recall that when President Medvedev of Russia was perforce required

to visit it for the concluding session of the Festival of Russia in 2008, a temporary reception room had to be built outside for our President to receive him because the facilities inside were so shabby. In stark contrast was Moscow's Bolshoi theatre, with its lush interiors and enviable technical excellence, where the Festival of India was inaugurated soon thereafter.

Venues like the Bolshoi are, of course, not uncommon throughout the west, and particularly in Europe, and there are historical reasons for this, including the fact that these nations were never colonized. But many other parts of the world are now waking up to the need to upgrade and expand their cultural infrastructure. The gallery district in Beijing, which was earlier the site of a munitions complex, has more than 150 galleries, neat cobbled streets and rows of street-side cafés. It was built on the eve of the Olympics, and is now a major tourist attraction. Even Shanghai boasts at least a hundred art galleries, and smaller towns throughout China are being encouraged to develop gallery districts. Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines have recently taken the decision to invest in a dozen state-of-the-art museums each. Hong Kong had devised a new cultural plan for 2008 which would cost $2.8 billion, an unprecedented investment per capita for an area so small. The oil-rich UAE has earmarked over $30 billion for museums and art programmes. And China, which destroyed a considerable part of its classical heritage during the Cultural Revolution, has invested in eighty-three national museums, and plans to boost the figure to a hundred by 2010. By contrast, our museums, the repositories of so much of our heritage, remain in visible neglect. There is no proper display, no worthwhile scholarship, no cataloguing commensurate with international standards, and no sense of pride in our priceless artefacts that would make us give them the attention and funds they deserve. The state of our monuments is not much better. The colonial devaluation of India's history has its most obvious manifestation in the manner in which we treat our monuments, leaving them—apart from a few high-profile structures—dilapidated, overrun, illegally occupied or defaced. The most worrying part is the ignorance: an overwhelming majority of people know next to nothing about the monuments of great antiquity and beauty which they pass every day. In New Delhi, for instance, most people living in Hauz Khaz or Safdarjung Enclave don't know—and don't think it is important to know—after whom their 'colonies' are named.

There has been no serious effort at taking the appreciation of art and antiquity to the masses. Schoolchildren make the mandatory visits, but in the absence of imaginatively designed capsules integrated with their school curriculum, or the latest interactive software at the museums, the visits hardly achieve their purpose of evoking in them an interest in their heritage. Without proper packaging and display even tourist footfalls are far below potential. The National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), has one of the richest collections of contemporary Indian art, but gets a paltry 30,000 visitors annually. Its branch in Mumbai, the financial capital of the country, gets even less. When in March 2009 the NGMA opened a new branch in Bangalore, the state government, in a shocking but symbolic decision, nominated the deputy minister of medical education to be the chief guest! Even if mechanical comparisons are not applicable, an idea of what is being lost can be gauged by the fact that the Museum of Modern Art in New York gets 2.5 million visitors a year at $30 a ticket; the Louvre in Paris as many at €12.5 per head; and the Tate in London four million at £20 per person.

Cultures cannot be fossilized, they must change and adapt with time. But malleability is not necessarily a constant and universal virtue. When cultures are the end-product of centuries of evolution, their forms and structures can be trifled with only for very good reasons; and the need to cater to the lowest common denominator of an unfortunately ignorant audience is not a good enough reason. Indian classical music is perhaps one of the oldest in the world; we see the beginnings of its structure in the musical recitation of the Sama Veda several hundred years before the birth of Christ. Narada's *Sangita Makarandha* of the eleventh century AD laid down rules that brought the discipline closer to how we know it today. With the coming of the Islamic rulers, a fusion of Hindu and Muslim creativity added to the refinement and complexity of our classical music. In southern India, Carnatic music, similar in grammar to the Hindustani music of the north but less influenced by Islamic musical traditions, had its own internal evolution. The two great composers Annamacharya (1425–1503) and Purandaradasa (1484–1564) laid the foundations of Carnatic music as we know it today, and the glorious trinity of

Tyagaraja (1767–1847), Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775–1835) and Syama Sastri (1762–1827) gave it a definitive oeuvre and structure that prevails to this day.

This very brief enumeration is meant to merely illustrate the long and considerable evolutionary lineage of Indian classical music, well into the twentieth century. One of the reasons why classical music could evolve relatively undisturbed is that even as a subject to be critiqued, it did not figure high among the 'reforming' priorities of the colonial rulers. Most of them found it incredibly opaque, staggeringly complex and 'occult'—the very basics of Indian music being so different from the western form—that they thought it best not to tinker with it. However, partly because of the rupture that colonial intervention causes an indigenous creative traditions, and partly because of foreign influences (to which post-colonial societies are disproportionately susceptible), we are witnessing today an onslaught on the basic tenets of classical music which is quite unprecedented. The centre piece of Indian classical music is, of course, the raga, a melodic (not harmonic, as in western classical music) scheme composed of a given structure of notes. The raga, through its slow elaboration, is meant to evoke a mood, redolent of the different seasons or the different times of the day or of different emotions. It is a remarkably intricate structure that allows the artist a great deal of creative freedom—within a framework of inflexible rules—for slow and careful elaboration. However, many leading exponents of the genre today, whether vocalists or instrumentalists, seem to have no inclination to patiently develop the spirit of a raga in their performances. In a manner more appropriate in an adolescent pop band, they are in a hurry to race through the initial, slow phases of a composition to reach the fast-paced crescendo, thereby foundationally mutilating the genre.

The excuse given, that this is what appeals to the audience, is fundamentally untenable. For centuries, great musicians have attempted to mould and educate their audience; and cultured societies cannot claim to be so if their role models are adept only at practising the policy of least resistance. If audiences do not know better and judge a classical artist only by his or her ability to emulate the beat of popular music, they need to be educated. Some pioneering work to this end has been done by SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) set up by Dr Kiran Seth in 1977. Their campaign to take the legacy of classical music to schools and colleges, and expose the young to some of its best exponents, has made a difference, but it is hardly enough. Classical musicians continue to mostly pander to the lowest common denominator, and the danger of a centuries'-old tradition gradually emasculating itself is growing.

Amjad Ali Khan, the great exponent of the sarod, tells a story where his father Hafiz Ali Khan, himself a musical giant, was asked by the then President of India, Zakir Husain, if he could do anything to help him. Hafiz Ali Khan replied that by the grace of God he had all he needed, but since the President had asked, could he use his high position to save the chastity of the raga Darbari Kangra? The anecdote is not, Amjad says, apocryphal. His father was even in the 1950s concerned about the erosion of the time-tested traditions for the exposition of a raga. Undeniably, classical soirees, earlier confined to the salons of the rich or the royal, have seen over time a welcome democratization, with ordinary people having greater access to performances. But the widening of the audience, and the concomitant commercialization, requires greater vigilance to ensure that the basics are not diluted. In London, Hyde Park gets thousands of people when there is a pop group performing, but the theatres for western classical music, too, have people queuing up for tickets. In a mature cultural civilization, audience appreciation cannot be about monoculture; the popular must flourish *with*, and not at the cost of, the classical. What prevents even a few—even one—of the hundred-odd FM radio and satellite TV channels in India from hosting at least a weekly programme of Indian classical music? There is, however, a full one-hour programme devoted to western classical music on a private FM channel. This is truly incredible—even allowing for the fact that a small minority listens to pure classical music, surely the numbers of those in India with a genuine interest in Hindustani and Carnatic music, rather than western classical, is far higher? Only the single government-owned FM channel will air a programme of Indian classical music, but either at midnight or in the afternoon when few people, if any, will tune in.

Classical dance, earlier exiled to the fringes because of the derisive British assessment equating all dancers with 'nautch girls' or devadasis, has got over this taint and appears to be flourishing. But in this case

too there is much that is disquieting below the surface. Here again, we are dealing with a discipline of great antiquity, whose principles were codified as far back as Bharata's *Natyashastra*. About Bharatanatyam,[17] the oldest of the classical dances, Leela Venkataraman, the country's leading dance critic, writes: 'Starting with the mnemonics and dance profile of the Alaripu, to the introduction of the first musical note in the Jatiswaram, to the word making its entry in the Shabdam, then the elaboration of all these features in the Varnam, the climax of the performance, to the intimate quiet of the Padam and finally . . . the abstraction of the Tillana where the dancer symbolically, through movement, aims to reach the state of non-movement, the entire designing leaves one speechless . . .'[18] But it is a sad commentary that even the finest dancers, who represent a tradition refined over two millennia, find it difficult to fill an auditorium. More often than not (with some venues in Chennai during the winter season being exceptions) the shows are not ticketed because people, including those who can well afford to, are not willing to pay. (When a famous ballet from Europe comes to town, however, the rich and famous and the aspiring will kill for tickets and passes and pack the auditoria.) More of the young, especially girls, are learning Indian classical dance today, but a leading dancer once told me that their knowledge of the language, literature, mythology, symbolism and philosophy underlying the dance compositions is unacceptably perfunctory, and they are content to mechanically learn only the *technique* of dance.

The essential point is that, like classical music, classical dance is by definition a complex form of creative expression, encompassing within it not only pure dance but theatre, mime, music, poetry and, above all, rasa. It cannot be 'simplified' without destroying its soul. A student of Kathak who is not steeped in the lore of Radha and Krishna and has no knowledge of Brajbhasha—the offshoot of Hindi in which the poetry of their love is written—can only perform the dance mechanically. An intrinsic part of all classical dances is abhinaya, the portrayal of emotion. Only a dancer who has studied the poetry that is at the heart of a dance composition, and has a knowledge of the music and the raga in which it is being sung, and is, over and above this, familiar with the philosophy and mythology underpinning the composition, can make the authentic emotional investment that abhinaya requires. Most young dancers, sadly, are inadequate in all of the above. They are lured to dance because of its glamour, or because it is regarded as a befitting social embellishment by ambitious parents. Leela Venkataraman quotes the lament of the great doyen of Kathak, Pandit Birju Maharaj: 'Aajkal ke students item seekhna chahte hain, Kathak nahin' (Today's students come to learn items, not Kathak). 'This race to become a performer,' Leela says, 'has led youngsters to seek short-term goals, and [there is] an all-pervading mediocrity and lack of depth in the dance scene.'[19]

This is a truly unfortunate development, especially in a culture where dance was conceived as an aspect of the divine. Shiva is Nataraj, the king of dance, and Krishna is Natwar, the prince among dancers. The timeless bronze images of Shiva doing the tandava, the cosmic dance of destruction and regeneration, have inspired countless generations, and continue to do so, with their sheer poetry, elegance, poise and suppressed energy. In what manner, then, can this ancient discipline be experimented with? Obviously, creativity cannot be shackled and stunted by the legacy of the past. But it is legitimate to interrogate the quality and motivation of what passes for 'contemporary classical dance'. Madhu Natraj is the director of the Stem Dance Kampini in Bangalore, which specializes in contemporary dance forms. She staunchly defends the need for experimentation, but accepts that a great deal of what is touted as 'contemporary' is a copy of what was being done in the London School of Contemporary Dance some decades ago. With a few Indian touches added, these become compositions that receive western attention because they appear 'different'. At home, mere plagiarism will work: Natraj gives the example of a well-known contemporary danseuse creating a production about walking on water which was a straight lift from the Broadway hit *Stomp*.

Experiments with established and highly evolved art forms succeed only in the hands of those who are rooted in that tradition and know the limits of what can change and what cannot. When the famous Stanislavski theatre in Russia sought to stage Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* in the 1970s, the veteran Kathak dancer Maya Rao, who was recruited as an adviser, found that the most difficult part was to make the Russian ballerinas walk on their feet and not on their toes. Certain forms of dance suit certain body types, and it is ridiculous to deny this. The

world may be flat, but not everything lends itself to 'fusion'. One morning in Bangalore I sat in the dance studio of Jayachandra Palazhy, watching him and a group of his students perform a contemporary dance piece. Jayachandra has learnt Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, as also the martial arts dance form of Kerala, Kalaripayattu. For some years now he has been experimenting with contemporary dance. That morning, I watched with interest as two men and two women moved vigorously on the stage, rolling on the ground and contorting their bodies in time to a soundtrack of modern, near-surrealistic music. Elements of Kalaripayattu could be discerned in some of their movements, but for the rest it came across to me as a clear emulation of western contemporary dance. Jayachandra is a talented artist, deeply committed to expanding the traditional dance repertoire of India; but while his intention is good, I got the distinct impression that in his search for the new he was inflicting a terrible violence on the old, an artistic tradition which, even if he is not prepared to accept it, has a greater claim on him than what he was emulating.

Classical dance in India can do with some carefully thought out and original experimentation, bringing in contemporary themes and reworking the 'officially' sanctioned hand and body movements, but the manner in which this is done is crucial. I once watched Malavika Sarukkai, a leading exponent of Bharatanatyam dance, depict a contemporary story about the Ganga in Varanasi. The theme was refreshingly different; the choreography was startlingly new; the music was from north India and not Carnatic classical as is the norm for Bharatanatyam; and even the words were in Hindi, not Tamil. For purists this was a clear violation of established rules, but Malavika carried it off with great élan. Her attempt was to gently push the horizons of tradition, creating space for the new without fatal injury to the old. Without a firm grounding in her or his own tradition, no artist can successfully borrow from the rhythm and vocabulary of another's. Daksha Seth, one of the pioneers of contemporary dance in India, learnt Kathak for eighteen years, Mayurbhanj Chhau for another seven and Kalaripayattu for over a decade. Only then did she begin to experiment with the new. Some of her productions, at least on the surface, seem to have nothing to do with her long training in the Indian dance forms, but she herself has confessed that 'there is forty

years of Kathak training in my body, and it will never leave me, and I don't want it to, because that is my base. My sense of music comes from my classical training, the way I explore rhythm comes from Kathak . . . The classical is my resource, the background for all the technique that I use and transform according to my imagination . . .'[20]

Dancers from the classical tradition need not cut themselves off from what is happening in dance internationally, and certainly there cannot be a case for unthinking insularity. But it is precisely because they are the product and custodians of a centuries'-old and sophisticated tradition that the transition must be made very carefully. To land enthusiastically but clumsily on the floor of somebody else's dance tradition, without considering what can be assimilated and what cannot, does injustice to both the authenticity of the old and the potential of the new. Interestingly, Jayachandra told me that in the 1930s leading choreographers from the west, such as Ruth Saint Denis, came to India to see what they could borrow from Indian classical dance, especially the choreography relating to Shiva and Parvati. The modern dance legend Martha Graham studied yoga to enrich the repertoire of her school. Anna Pavlova recruited Uday Shankar, who played a young Krishna, in her productions (and advised Rukmini Devi Arundale, who was fascinated by ballet, to rediscover classical dance in her own country instead). None of them, however, began immediately to attempt Bharatanatyam or Kathak or Kuchipudi. This should be instructive for practitioners of contemporary Indian dance: if they borrow uncritically and completely jettison the tradition that has shaped them, they will not earn acceptance and respect abroad, nor will they make any significant impact on audiences in India.

The state of contemporary Indian theatre is even sadder. Lilette Dubey, the well-known theatre person and actress, once used a phrase, perhaps unconsciously, that is incredibly apt. Speaking about the shoestring budgets and lack of professionalism that plague Hindi theatre, she said the productions look rather 'apologetic'. The word captures perfectly the shabby, half-hearted and diffident state of theatre in India. There are a few—just a few—well-known playwrights, and even among them, those who have a national following can be counted on the fingers of one hand. There is little funding, no committed audiences, except perhaps in Maharashtra and Bengal, and very little

original work of high quality. This in the land of Kalidasa, whose plays were being staged 2000 years ago on sophisticated principles for drama developed a couple of hundred years earlier. India is nowhere near having its own Broadway, or an audience that would queue up to buy tickets for a good play. I recall seeing in Moscow, during the years of transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union, people standing in queue in sub-zero temperatures to buy tickets for a new play by a celebrated Russian playwright, even though many of them probably hadn't been paid for months.

I met Girish Karnad, arguably India's most famous playwright and theatre person, over lunch in Bangalore, where he lives. Girish said that he could think of only two theatre centres in all of India where someone who went to see a play could later sit down and discuss it over a cup of tea. It is not enough, he said, to have halls which can stage theatre, although these too are in short supply. What is required is for a stage to be part of a vibrant cultural complex where audiences can 'see a play and then chat about it'. Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai and the Rang Shankara in Bangalore are the only theatre places which offer this ambience. Rang Shankara was built only recently, in 2004; although it is a small auditorium with a capacity of 300, it is in addition a cultural centre with a buzzing cafeteria, and has staged a play every single day since it opened. This one institution, Girish said, has the potential to transform Kannada theatre, but we need many more like it across the country. Unsurprisingly, nobody—and least of all the government—cares. It is not that the government cannot deliver. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, the country's premier agency for the promotion of theatre and dance, set up in 1952, did pioneering work in the early years; it identified and promoted the beautiful Chhau dance form from the north-east, nurtured the near-extinct Manipuri classical dance from the same region, and gave much-needed support to the compellingly pristine yet nearly forgotten Dhrupad form of classical music. But the original inspiration got hopelessly mired in bureaucratic inertia in the decades that followed. As a result, things are hopelessly skewed in our cultural landscape. No one can deny the space that television and films command today. It is not a phenomenon peculiar to India. But, as Girish Karnad mentioned to me, the lament is not that the space for popular entertainment has grown, the tragedy

is that the space for anything more cerebral has shrunk so dramatically. Popular music, for instance, has its place, but something is seriously wrong if tickets sell briskly only for film, pop or fusion artists and halls go half empty—even when entry is free—for great performers of classical music and dance. This either–or scenario diminishes the canvas of an ancient civilization.

The only reason for this can be a lack of respect for our own cultural traditions—as if we have internalized the criticism of our indigenous culture by our old colonial rulers—which manifests itself as a shocking neglect of the humanities in our education system. In our schools, the science and commerce streams are hugely privileged, especially at the senior secondary level, and a student opting for 'arts' (as the humanities stream, comprising history, literature and political science, is popularly known) is an embarrassment to his or her teachers and parents. The humanities departments of the universities are mostly cess-pools of mediocrity, where original thinking is discouraged and learning by rote is encouraged. Teachers who can engage the minds of the young with fresh ideas and concepts are rare to find, and there are few students willing to go beyond the routine preparation for exams. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and some of our medical colleges compare favourably with those in the rest of the world, but mature civilizations cannot be reduced to an unsustainable linear simplicity: good engineers and doctors and little else. This bias has ensured that the humanities departments of an overwhelming majority of our universities are obviously substandard. There is hardly any original output; doctoral works are usually collations of secondary material, laboriously footnoted to give the illusion of research. With the exception of some elite institutions, a pervasive sense of shabby weariness informs these departments. Gunnar Myrdal, who wrote a monumental work in the mid-1960s on the unfolding drama of development in Asian countries, had noticed this malaise even then. His comments cover South Asia as a whole, but have a special relevance to India:

> Every western visitor to South Asian universities is struck by the uncritical attitude of the average student: he expects the professor and the textbooks (often only certain pages are prescribed reading) to impart to him the knowledge he needs, and accepts what is

offered to him without much intellectual effort of his own . . . His submissiveness in this respect stands in curious contrast to his readiness to protest if he feels that requirements in examinations are unduly taxing . . . Teaching in South Asian schools at all levels tends to discourage independent thinking and the growth of that inquisitive and experimental bent of mind that is so essential for development. It is directed toward enabling students to pass examinations and obtain degrees and, possibly, admittance to the next level of schools. A degree is the object pursued, rather than the knowledge and skills to which the degree should testify.[21]

Contrast this with Hieun Ṭsang's description of the Nalanda University in the seventh century AD, and the dramatic decline in excellence becomes vivid. 'All around pools of translucent water shone with the open petals of the blue lotus flowers,' wrote Hieun Tsang of the university campus where he lived as a student. 'Here and there lovely kanaka trees hung down their deep red blossoms; and woods of dark mango trees spread their shade between them. In the different courts, the houses of the monks were each four stories in height. The pavilions had pillars ornamented with dragons, rafters richly carved, columns ornamented with jade, painted red and richly chiselled, and balustrades of carved open work.' Nalanda was founded in AD 427 (and burnt down by Bakhtiyar Khilji in AD 1197) and attracted students from as far as China and Japan in the East to Turkey and Persia in the West. It was a genuine centre for intellectual debate and enquiry in the fields of philosophy and metaphysics, linguistics, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and politics and statecraft, playing host in its heyday to 10,000 students in the hands of 2000 world-renowned teachers. Universities distinguished for their academic excellence and original thinking existed also in Kashi, Kanchi and Takshashila.

Today, the glitter has gone from almost all educational institutions which are not institutes of technology or medicine or management. Few schools, including the government-run Kendriya Vidyalayas, have a subject on art or art appreciation in the higher classes. If the young are not exposed to art, where will the discriminating and knowledgeable audience, so necessary to sustain and develop culture in any country,

come from? Ramnivas Mirdha, the erudite octogenarian who is the president of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, once lamented to me that this ancient land may be losing the ability to create the rasiks who can appreciate culture and help promote and nourish it. He said that if the country's GDP falls by a percentage or two, it will recover, but if the country's culture is neglected, the damage will be irreparable.

'Bollywood' has grown in confidence and output, and acquired popularity abroad as well, especially in countries where there is a significant population of Indian origin. But very few of the thousand or so films that India makes every year are of quality, and a great many are straight lifts of Hollywood productions. Innumerable websites give graphic details of this plagiaristic orgy, listing film after film—many of them hits—which have liberally 'borrowed' from some foreign film's story, music and screenplay, often without acknowledgement. To mention just a few recent examples: *Akele Hum Akele Tum* is a copy of *Kramer vs Kramer*; *Hey Baby* is a copy of *Three Men and a Baby*; *Road* is a copy of *The Hitchhiker*; *Dhamaal* is a copy of *Rat Race*; *Black* is a copy of *The Miracle Worker*; *Salaam Namaste* is a copy of *Nine Months*; *Murder* is a copy of *Unfaithful*; *Partner* is a copy of *Hitch*; *Kaante* is a copy of *Reservoir Dogs*; *Main Hoon Na* is a copy of *Never Been Kissed*; *Dil Hai Ki Maanta Nahin* is a copy of *It Happened One Night*; *Baazigar* is a copy of *A Kiss Before Dying*; *Phir Hera Pheri* is a copy of *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*; *Bunty Aur Babli* is a copy of *Bonnie & Clyde*; *Ghulam* is a copy of *On the Waterfront*; *Chachi 420* is a copy of *Mrs Doubtfire*. The list can be endless. Where the story is not a complete rip-off, the 'look and feel' of a film is borrowed—entire scenes are deftly swiped. For instance, the opening train sequence of *Sholay*, a film that is universally celebrated as a watershed in popular Indian cinema, is a frame by frame lift from the 1950s' classic *Northwest Frontier*.[22]

The same syndrome afflicts film music. This is particularly painful because songs are the distinguishing feature of Indian films, and were of a very high quality—both for their lyrics and composition—in the early years. But even then, plagiarism was not unknown. The popular composer duo of the 1960s and 1970s, Shankar Jaikishen, did not bat an eyelid when taking Elvis Presley's 'Who makes my heart beat like thunder' to fit the song *'Kaun hai jo sapnon mein aaya'*. Even earlier, a respected music composer like Salil Choudhary did not think it was in

any way wrong to set the song *'Itna na mujhse tu pyaar baddha'* to Mozart's Symphony No. 40. This fine art of plagiarism reached its apogee under the baton of composers Anu Malik and Bappi Lahiri; the former makes the fine point that unless a tune is a *complete* lift it cannot be called plagiarism. With such original ethics the industry is doing just fine. The theme music of the 2008 blockbuster *Race* is a direct copy of two South Korean tracks; Shantanu Moitra's popular *'Pal pal'* song from the 2007 hit *Lage Raho Munnabhai* is a straight theft of Cliff Richard's 'Theme for a Dream'; Bappi Lahiri's 'famous' tune for the song *'Hari Om Hari'* is entirely a copy of 'One Way Ticket'; *'Jahaan teri yeh nazar hai'*, the hit song of the Amitabh Bachchan film *Kaalia*, is clearly 'inspired' by the Persian song 'Heleh Maali' by Zia Atabay. Even R.D. Burman's hugely popular number *'Mehbooba Mehbooba'* from *Sholay* is an almost complete copy of 'Say You Love Me' by the Greek singer Demi Roussos.

Why does the Indian film industry need to copy so much? Of course, there are people of great artistic calibre within it who would wince at this blatant infringement of copyright. However, even they sometimes get co-opted into the great mimicry game. True, the industry has to keep commercial considerations in mind, but so does film-making anywhere in the world. Do our mimics believe that the audiences of India will never know? Do they genuinely believe that a cut-and-paste job is a good enough substitute for creativity? And are they happy at this devaluation, so long as the copied film turns out to be a money maker? Why have the standards of one of the oldest—and certainly the most prolific—film industry in the world fallen to this extent? Are Indian storywriters incapable of developing an original plot of their own? Why do producers and directors and musicians knowingly devalue their creative credentials and acquiesce in this shoddy, unethical short cut? These are questions that need to be asked, even as we take legitimate pride in the expansion of our cinema and its growing appeal world-wide.

Muzaffar Ali, the sensitive film-maker of classics like *Umrao Jaan*, argues that Hollywood has become a universal brand leader because it has used the cinematic idiom to project a vision of the world in sync with its own priorities. 'They have made hundreds of films to ensure the Holocaust is never repeated in history,' Muzaffar says. 'But what have we done for the even larger holocaust of 1857 or the largest immigration in human history following the partition of India in 1947?' Indian cinema, he notes, is 'stuck between a highly personalized and subjective art form and an extremely crude and mindless commercial enterprise'.[23] The contradiction between 'art' cinema and commercial films or between entertainment and good cinema should not need to exist in the first place. It is because 'mainstream' cinema produces, in the name of entertainment, so many films that are unoriginal, derivative and mediocre that the annual film festival officially organized in India in Goa is such a lacklustre affair. It creates hardly any ripple in the annual cinematic calendar. Cannes and BAFTA and the Oscars rule the roost, while the film industry which produces the largest number of films in the world remains happily reconciled to play second fiddle.

Pan Nalin, a perceptive commentator, who is also a film-maker, has deep reservations about the very name 'Bollywood'. 'It's like calling Narayana Murthy Nill Mates. The sad part is that the industry seems proud to be branded as Bollywood.' 'Indian cinema,' Nalin says, 'needs to do much more than that to be global. If India has mythology bigger than mangas, sagas bigger than *Star Wars*, legends larger than *Lord of the Rings*, then why do we look to the west for imitation?' As against the rampant imitation in Bollywood, he asks the valid counter-question: 'Does anyone know of any Indian story or film being remade in Hollywood?' The truth, he points out, is emphatically the opposite. 'Hundreds of Bollywood movies are a direct imitation of Hollywood movies. Movies with song and dance are a part of our existence. But why do they fail to become universal? . . . If the Italians invented neo-realism in cinema, the Germans expressionism, the French new wave, then what did we invent? Bollywood?' Palin concludes, 'Indian cinema will be global only if it takes root in Indian soil and then grows like a banyan tree sprouting roots in other countries. Ages ago our stories were universal. If not, a child in Indonesia would not be watching *Ramayana* today. Our stories were timeless. If not, Tibetans would not be reciting [the] Tantras.'[24]

Mainstream cinema is not the only example of how our popular culture, too, is distorted by the lack of originality and self-respect that is the consequence of colonialism. Every morning when I pick up

Indian newspapers in English I see foreign cartoon strips and wonder why no one ever asks why they need to be there. Not because there is anything wrong about them per se, but because their characters and situations and humour are so alien to our own. Calvin and Hobbes, Ginger Meggs, Bringing up Father, Dilbert, Peanuts, The Wizard of Id—all of them understandably popular in their own country but incongruous in mine. Even I, who am a part of the privileged English-as-the-first-language minority, cannot often understand their humour. Yet newspapers carry them without a moment's introspection. For the English-speaking elite in India, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Marathi or Malayalam comic strips will not do, even in translation. It is a strange situation, and I cannot help thinking what it would be like if leading newspapers in America or England carried, day after day, Chacha Chaudhary or Feluda comic strips.

After the many 'oscillations' we have discussed earlier, Indian paintings appear to be finally getting their value on the international stage; galleries in the metropolitan cities are proliferating, as are art collectors. From a paltry turnover of Rs 5 crore in 1997, the art market is today estimated at over Rs 1000 crore and, except for the dip due to the recession of 2009, is set to continue to grow at 35 per cent annually. The first real breakthrough came in 2002, when Masanari Fukuoka, the biggest collector of Indian art in Japan, bought Tyeb Mehta's work 'Celebration' for $317,500 at a Christie's auction in New York. In 2005, at Christie's again, it was another work of Mehta's—'Mahisasura'—that demolished the million-dollar barrier, selling for an unheard amount of over $1.5 million. Since then, works by several Indian artists—Amrita Sher-Gil, Souza, Gaitonde, M.F. Husain, Rameshwar Broota, S.H. Raza, Atul Dodiya, Subodh Gupta, to name just a few—have fetched high prices in the international art market.

But while all this is for the good, and has been cause for much euphoria, it is sobering to bear in mind that of the Asian nations, it is China and not India that is ruling the global art market. In 2008, eleven of the world's twenty top-selling artists were Chinese; one artist, Zhang Xiaogang, who specializes in large canvasses of faces seemingly taken from family photographs during the Cultural Revolution, alone had auction sales totalling $56 million in 2007.[25] According to the Art Price Index, in 2007, Chinese artists accounted for more than one-third of the 100 most expensive artists worldwide, claiming prices that rivalled top western artists, including Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. Not surprisingly, both the Guggenheim Museum of New York and the Georges Pompidou Centre of Paris were considering opening branches in China.

The comparison with China is apt because, like India, it too is a continent-sized nation and has a cultural lineage as old. If Chinese artists, in spite of the setback of the Cultural Revolution, are selling at far higher prices, is the euphoria in India about the new international recognition of Indian art justified? It is true that sales at such prices are unprecedented, and worthy of celebration, but should not our hyperbolic reaction be indexed to parallel developments in art elsewhere? The recent successes should also provoke an assessment of the state of our hardware: do we have enough galleries and are they of internationally acceptable professional standards? And what is the state of our art scholarship? Do we have enough curators who have the professional training to ensure high standards and discover creativity? According to one estimate, in spite of the recent art boom, there are only about 500 serious collectors in a country where the very rich (who can easily afford to buy our best art and provide much-needed patronage) easily number, at the very least, more than twenty million. As has been noted earlier, the country's biggest and most prestigious gallery—the NGMA—gets no more than 30,000 visitors per year, including foreign tourists. Is contemporary art an isolated oasis, sealed off from wider public knowledge and appreciation, provoking interest only for the hefty amount some artist gets at an auction abroad?

If we are honest, the answers to these questions should be cause for genuine concern. This is all the more so because much of what passes for contemporary art—abstract art in particular—is plain imitation of western trends. One development, especially, that of installation art, frankly borders very often on gimmickry, and is an embarrassing attempt to copy western trends of 'found art', popularized, among others, by the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Duchamp's installation of a common urinal, which he titled 'Fountain', was selected

in 2004 by 500 renowned artists and historians in the west as 'the most influential art work of the 20th century'. The elevation of common urinals may be comprehensible as part of a certain artistic evolution, but there is no need for Indians to be part of it. Besides, installation art, embedded in our own cultural context, has a living tradition in the decorations for Indian festivals, marriages and a host of other celebrations that are part of the ebb and flow of everyday life. My suspicion, though—and several leading artists I have spoken to seem to agree—is that most artists experimenting with installations are merely copying western idiom and themes, and are encouraged by western galleries and curators, and their hangers-on in India, to do just that.

One important reason why such developments go largely unquestioned is that there is hardly any scholarly evaluation of our own artistic principles, or discussion of what our aesthetic yardsticks should be. It is disturbing that even today the curriculum of our art colleges is hopelessly outdated; they rely disproportionately on western studio techniques and continue to make the invidious distinction between art and craft that is so completely a western construct. As per Indian aesthetics, a work of art is to be judged by its quality, and not categorized by its origins. A painter making a Madhubani painting on the walls of a village home in Bihar is as much an artist as a 'sophisticated' city-bred painter. When such distinctions are made mindlessly, there is the real danger of the vibrant and ancient folk art of India being de-contextualized, wrenched away from its natural environment and promoted only as some rustic curiosity. Should this happen, a great tradition will lose its organic sustenance, and curl up and die.

But the real tragedy is that there is no serious discussion on any subject relating to art and culture in the media. Most newspapers and magazines have no space for the learned review; or perhaps they don't have such space because there are very few learned reviewers. Much of the new activity we see on the art scene is thus like a hothouse plant, not without energy, but poorer for the absence of a lively and serious space for critical appraisal. The contrast with the west is stark. Their reviewers may have voted a common urinal as the most influential work of art in the twentieth century, but the business of critiques is

taken very seriously. Reviewers enjoy both power and respect and command bulky sections in almost any serious publication with a mass readership. In India, some leading newspapers—with pan-Indian readership in English—have done away with space for art and book reviews. It is a barren landscape, where informed discussion and debate on developments in the field of art and culture is almost non-existent. Indians may be argumentative in other matters, but in art and aesthetics there is a general intellectual inertness that can only be described as uncultured.

The purpose here is to identify a malaise, and not to tarnish the few honourable exceptions to the norm. Unless we take stock of the fact that a civilization that structured itself—from the time of the Vedas and the Upanishads—on dialogue, enquiry and interrogation is today bereft of such a spirit in the vital area of creativity, we may grow in terms of our economic statistics but will remain stunted in civilizational terms. Why is it that the capital of a country with an ancient and rich history of the creative arts does not have—with the exception of two insignificant lanes named after Tansen and Kaifi Azmi—any roads or squares or gardens named after poets, musicians, painters and philosophers? The city of London is dotted with blue plaques commemorating homes where its scholars, artists and intellectuals lived. In Delhi, until recently, even the haveli of its greatest Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, was occupied by a kabadiwallah, and was recently rented out for a wedding reception. For a civilization that put such a high premium on aesthetics, why is it that in 2008, at the famous Hampi festival of *classical* music and dance, the organizers brought in Bollywood performers, arguing that the audience would hardly respond to anything else, and made thermocol reproductions in garish colours of the monuments as stage backdrops?

There is something terribly wrong in all of this, and while genuine creative achievements deserve praise, we need to honestly reassess the art scene in its totality. Too often, our threshold for this is too low. Our responses are still conditioned by the colonial experience, and often ignorant of the antiquity, distinctiveness and sophistication of our artistic traditions, we are happy to celebrate even the mediocre. Can India's artistic endeavours find their own equilibrium again? Can our artists pursue the goal of harmony and beauty and rhythm and

proportion in sync with our philosophy and world view, without reacting unduly—the great bane of post-colonial elites—to the slightest criticism or praise from the west? Will they realize that they are the inheritors of one of the world's most ancient and evolved civilizations—a civilization that once set the standard for excellence—and that therefore it is a sin for them to be imitative or derivative, or to neglect what is their own in the blind pursuit of what is not? This is the challenge of the future, the unfinished revolution still waiting to happen, and it will become all the more difficult to achieve in an era of aggressive globalization.

6

THE EMPIRE AT YOUR THRESHOLD

On a recent July morning I visited the Tower of London. I wanted to see the Kohinoor, the diamond that once added lustre to the Mughal court in India. In the museum you have to step on to a conveyor belt that propels you slowly past the array of gold and diamonds and rubies and sapphires of the crown jewels. And amongst these, resplendent in the centre of the crown made for the Queen Mother in 1937, was the Kohinoor. It seemed curiously small, almost as if it could not match up to its own legend, but I was told that the original stone had been deliberately pared down to enhance its dazzle and lustre. At the end of the display, occupying a panel by itself on a velvet cushion with gold boundaries and tassels, was the Imperial Crown of India, 1911, studded with rubies and sapphires, and encrusted with diamonds, with a huge deep green emerald at its centre and a diamond orb on the top.

The Kohinoor was not the only priceless stone that came to Britain from India. In 1701, Thomas Pitt, while governor of Madras, helped himself to a diamond weighing over 410 carats from the Golconda mines of the Mughal emperor. Christened the Pitt Diamond, it was valued even then at £125,000; Pitt later sold it to the Prince Regent of France, who made it a part of the French crown. Robert Clive was notorious too for converting his enormous loot from India into

diamonds for safe passage to England. Through such jewels carried safely home, and other more institutional means which involved destroying local industries, looting local raw material and dumping British goods made with the same material back for sale in the colony, British per capita income increased in the period from 1747 to 1947 by 347 per cent. In the same period, India's grew by a mere 14 per cent.

The Empire was useful to the rulers in other ways too. Two-thirds of Clive's troops in the decisive battle of Plassey, which he won, were Indian. About a century later, during the revolt of 1857, more than 80 per cent of the casualties in the successful British takeover of Delhi were Indian. In the First World War, a million Indians served overseas for the Empire, and 60,000 of them gave their lives for it, their names carved in stone at the India Gate memorial in New Delhi as compensation. Two and a half million Indians fought for the British in the Second World War, in conditions where an Indian soldier was paid a salary of Rs 18 and a British soldier Rs 75.

After 1947, the traffic of wealth and resources did not end. Along with the Kohinoor and the enormous wealth that helped to fund the Empire, the Empire was at the threshold of the United Kingdom in other ways. The blue London County Council plaque at 45, Berkeley Square proclaims simply: CLIVE OF INDIA, SOLDIER AND ADMINISTRATOR, LIVED HERE (1725–1774). Nothing particularly distinguishes the four-storey brownstone from the others around it. A similar looking house down the road belongs—so another plaque informs us—to George Canning (1770–1830), another stalwart of British rule in India. Round the corner, in the same square, considered now to be the most expensive commercial property in the world, are the offices of Air India. Opposite Clive's home, beyond the stately chestnut trees and the lovely garden framed by the square, is a posh Indian restaurant, Benares. And not far away are the offices of Britain's most wealthy person, Lakshmi Mittal, an Indian.

A sign in the window of Air India's offices in London proclaims: 'Come, India is Calling'. It was an invitation Clive hadn't waited for; he had presumed it long before it was actually made! But Clive could hardly have imagined that less than three hundred years after he safely transported his diamonds to London, Indians would constitute the single largest ethnic minority in that city, numbering close to 200,000, and owning 10,000 businesses with a turnover touching $15 billion annually. He had gone to conquer India, to subjugate and loot the Indians in their own land. The thought that one consequence of his success would be that so many Indians would make *his* country their permanent home could never have crossed his mind. According to a survey released by Manchester University, Indian-dominant Leicester and Birmingham will have minority white populations by 2019 and 2024 respectively. As per the 2001 British census, Indians already account for 26 per cent of the population of Leicester. Apart from Indians, an entire range of ethnic minorities, representing different parts of the once invincible Pax Britannica, have become a permanent feature of the British landscape. London alone has 115,000 Bangladeshis, 108,000 Jamaicans, 91,000 Nigerians and 81,000 Pakistanis. There are, in addition, sizeable numbers of people of Ugandan, Kenyan and Zimbabwean origin. By some calculations, the 'brown wash' over Britain will deepen and widen in the years to come, since at least in the case of two important minorities—the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis—the birth rate is dramatically above the national average. White British mothers have a birth rate of 1.7; the corresponding rate for Bangladeshis is 3.9 and for Pakistanis 4.7. Without doubt the Empire has firmly returned to Great Britain, making it—along with its Chinese, Cypriot, Irish, Arabic and, more recently, Polish and East European immigrants—one of the most unique living laboratories in the world to observe the interplay and interaction of diverse cultures and identities.

We have discussed how the British Empire subverted and distorted the culture and identity of its subjects. But now that so many of its former subjects have arrived in the island to roost, it is valid to ask how their presence will modify the assumptions about *British* culture and identity. The political scientist Kymbica argued that immigrants must waive their right to assert their culture since they have voluntarily left their country of origin. This, of course, would be the ideal solution for societies like Britain which, as a consequence of Empire, have been forced, almost against their will, to become multicultural. But the truth is that ancient and complex cultures like India's give to all their legatees an identity that cannot be left behind like unclaimed baggage at the immigration counter. However much the 'mother culture' may have been distorted or diluted, it still gives to a people—by the very

weight of its antiquity and specificity—a unique identity that sticks like some primeval glue, and advertises itself through a range of manifestations: colour, language, religion, habits, ritual, behaviour, memory, dress, cuisine and custom. Even if immigrants want to erase it in their adopted country, they cannot; and even if the majority original population has learnt the virtues of tolerance and is therefore not hostile, it will always be conscious of the *difference* that this cultural identity creates.

Subcultural diversities, which are about difference within a *shared* culture, are, as Bhikhu Parekh argues, normal in any society and much easier to deal with. But 'perspectival diversity', which is about the difference between *separate* cultures, cannot be benignly accommodated by the enlightened indulgence of liberal thinkers, or eliminated by the rhetoric and violence of right-wing fanatics. The British project of 'multiculturalism' is well intentioned and laudable, especially when contrasted with the far less flexible approach of other former colonial powers like France, which champions the notion of a homogenized state reflecting primarily the values of the dominant mainstream. But the proponents of multiculturalism, and those engaged in a post-multicultural debate, must understand one basic truth: differences in culture and identity, especially where colour and religion are involved, cannot be erased; and attempts to underplay them, as has become fashionable in a globalizing world, will lead to wrong solutions. While a composite and tolerant society is certainly a desirable goal, it would be wishful thinking to believe that such a society can eradicate cultural differences or make them invisible and irrelevant.

The history of post-Second World War immigration into Britain brings this out with abundant clarity. In 1948 Britain offered free entry to all its 'imperial' subjects, but a year later Birmingham could count only a hundred Indians among its residents. In the next ten years the number of Indians and Pakistanis in all of the UK did not much exceed 50,000. Even this small, dispersed alien presence was enough to create violent antibodies. Many of the early immigrants from India were Sikhs—hard-working men and women fulfilling at low wages the demand for semi-skilled labour in a Britain rebuilding itself after the war. However, their most common experience was of social exclusion: they were considered 'unhygienic' and unacceptably strange, their

beards and turbans attracting the greatest attention. (The notion of a stranger being unclean is not uncommon in the collision of cultures. The British, when they first arrived in India, and for years afterwards, were called mleccha, or unclean, by Indians, especially upper-caste Hindus.) As the number of coloured immigrants grew, the British government sought to revise its earlier imperial generosity. The Commonwealth Immigration Act of July 1962 was devised to put a lid on this unwanted influx. Ironically, apprehending such a measure, the three preceding years saw a flood of immigrants, almost doubling the size of the Indian community in Britain.

The early immigrants were largely docile, and their lower social standing and income levels were very obvious. On arrival at Heathrow, one could see that Indians, mostly women, were part of the sweep-and-swab staff; a great many of the porters were coloured or Asian; and a fair majority of taxi and bus drivers were from the Indian subcontinent. Everywhere, almost everyone doing manual labour was non-white and a migrant. To a visitor from India this was even more visible because of the lower-class tag attached to such work back home. The primary aim of the new migrants was to find a livelihood, a job of any description or a business however small. At least back then, most of them had left India because of economic compulsions; it was an adventurous, brave leap into uncertain waters. Given the penurious circumstances in which they arrived, they did not want to aggressively emphasize their difference. If left alone, they would have liked to become invisible, attract as little notice as possible, be excessively accommodating, even contrite, and avoid giving offence. But there was nothing they could do about the difference in colour, religion and language. At the general level, the reaction of the British people was hostile, not to their presence per se, for there was need for cheap labour, but to the difference that they and other coloured immigrants embodied. *Keep Britain White* was the slogan of the early anti-black riots. Organized gangs of white hoodlums would routinely attack black neighbourhoods in the early 1960s—petrol bombs were a common gift for homes in Nottingham, where most of the immigrants from the Caribbean lived—and the black prime minister of Jamaica was roughed up in the streets of London. In the 1964 elections, the openly racist sneer was: *If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour.*

Rental notices would openly say that the coloured were not welcome; a coloured person in a traditional English pub was asking for trouble; and there was open discrimination on the basis of colour in job recruitment.

The purpose in excavating the worst period in the history of race relations in Britain is to try to understand why such a reaction took place. Every society is hostile to a foreign presence within it that does not appear to be 'assimilable'. That hostility can be moderated, even sublimated, but the differences of culture and identity that provoked it, cannot. Certainly, racial discrimination is not a monopoly of the British; Indians themselves are notorious for their colour consciousness, and in their case it is even more ridiculous since they are coloured themselves. And it is necessary to remember that the leadership in Britain—or at least some segments of it—did try to stem the generally hostile public reaction to the growing number of the 'foreign' among them. The 1966 Race Relations Act was passed with the specific aim of managing such differences since it was no longer possible to believe that they did not exist or that they would simply melt away with time. But in spite of such efforts, the consequence of Empire showed no signs of diminishing. In 1968, Jomo Kenyatta, who wanted Kenya for black Africans only, gave marching orders to Asian Kenyans, the majority of them being of Indian origin. The deportees invoked their British passports and landed as refugees at Heathrow. Three years later, Idi Amin got the same idea in Uganda; thousands of Asian Ugandans were expelled, and like their Kenyan counterparts, they came to Britain. It must go to the enduring credit of civil society in Britain that, appalled by the insane atrocities of Idi Amin and the plight of the refugees, a national fund-raising campaign was launched for their welfare and rehabilitation. But it is equally true that British official policy towards immigrants was decisively biased by the fact of colour. The Act of 1 March 1968 declared that 'full citizenship was available only to those with a parent or grandparent born, adopted or naturalized in the UK'. As the historian Robert Winder points out, 99 out of 100 times this legislation would favour only whites.[1] There were, in any case, no qualifying restrictions for white immigrants from the white Commonwealth—Australia, New Zealand and Canada. White Rhodesians, too, though tainted by the vice of apartheid, found a warm welcome in the mother country. Even impoverished Czech and Hungarian immigrants, or those from Cyprus, had easier access essentially because they were white and Christian.

That such a biased policy could be pursued in the UK where liberal opinion has a verifiable record of influence, is a pointer to the stubborn, enduring nature of the markers of culture and identity. Colour will not wash away; religious loyalties are not easily swapped; value systems, acquired by a process of osmosis, cannot be discarded like a soiled costume; language, with all the subtleties of meaning embedded in its usage, cannot be easily jettisoned. Together these constitute a core that sets people apart in *perpetuity*. How then do ethnic minorities negotiate their own cultural space and notion of identity while coping with the pressure to become like the majority? Does their salvation lie in becoming 'boutique' cultures, little islands of difference in a sea of conformity, surviving on the benevolence of multiculturalist policy planners? And is this benevolence misguided; is aggressive assertion the only answer?

What is lost and what is gained in the transaction between numerically unequal ethnicities is not easy to compute, especially since there is no one way to define loss and gain. One thing is certain, though—that people react adversely when what they hold dear is undervalued and what they consider undesirable has societal approval. Even if we accept that bridges can be built across cultures, we must also recognize that cultures are often obstinately opaque to the outsider. Given this, we need to reassess to what extent people can change, and if they can, how much of that change is desirable. What are the defensive reactions and comfort zones individuals resort to when they see their culture and identity under threat? What are the hidden traumas, the subterranean psychological stresses that result from this interplay between cultures, and how do they manifest themselves when they surface? And finally, even when much is willingly or otherwise discarded, does what remains prove that minorities—especially those whose psyche has been shaped by ancient and established cultures—can indeed reinvent themselves as fully as they think they can, or as much as the majority would want them to? These are not easy questions. But it is worth looking for answers in the personal experience of individuals—by observing their behaviour,

listening to their narratives, being sensitive to their pain and bewilderment and joys—and relying essentially on what has been called the 'thick description', which fleshes out the manner in which people react and respond, and behave and conduct themselves in everyday life.

Prem Chaddha and his brother Pran came to London in May 1962, just before the expiry of the June deadline for visa-free entry for Indians. They had no place to stay, and almost no money—even if they'd had the means to rent an apartment, it would have been tough; several landlords specified in their advertisements that 'coloureds' were 'not eligible'. One of their relatives worked in the Indian High Commission and he gave them temporary shelter in his tiny basement quarters in Bayswater. Finding a job was not easy. Many establishments openly declared 'whites only' policy. Their social life was restricted, too, since it was not uncommon to see notices outside pubs and similar establishments saying that non-whites were not welcome. Prem and Pran hadn't quite expected that they'd have a tough time in Britain. They came from a background that would have been considered relatively privileged in India at the time. But in London this was of little consequence. They realized, with some surprise, that to most people their only identity was that they were coloured people from a poor country which the British had ruled for centuries, and that they were looking for work in an economy still recovering from post-war depression.

In such a hostile environment, Indians supported Indians. The community was far from being as wealthy as it is today. Most Indians worked in menial jobs, or as underpaid semi-skilled labour; very few had made a breakthrough in business, and even the more educated considered themselves lucky if they found jobs at the lowest rungs of the government. But in spite of such straitened means their doors were mostly open to new arrivals from India. It was the 'homing pigeon' instinct, an explicit bonding based on culture and kinship. Many new migrants found initial shelter in the gurdwara at Shepherd's Bush. The gurdwara, the first in the country and in Europe, gave free food and, whenever possible, makeshift shelter. It became a symbol not only of religious belief, but of community solidarity.

Shepherd's Bush is five minutes from Southall. When the immigrants

wanted to buy their own houses, they could not move east because the property prices were too high. They could only move west in the direction of Southall, which soon became the first Indian ghetto in London. Southall is a living example of how people from a different cultural space create incrementally, imperceptibly but unmistakably a physical and social environment that reflects that difference. When I last visited it in the summer of 2005, some fifty years after the first Indian immigrants made it their home, this basic truth was vibrantly visible. Mounds of fresh vegetables, reminiscent of the traditional mandi in Indian towns, spilled out of grocery shops piled with goods imported from India. The vegetables were those that are popular in India; the shops were dominated by Indian brands—including some that made no commercial sense because similar products made locally would probably be cheaper and just as good. Yet they were imported into the UK because they represented a continuum, a familiarity that recalled India: Afghan Snow cream, Isabgol, Cinthol talcum powder, incense packets, Lipton tea and traditional spices. The garment shops had mannequins draped in saris and salwar-kameezes. Restaurants advertised every variety of Indian food; some proudly proclaimed that they were '100 per cent vegetarian' while tandoori and Bangladeshi 'balti' outlets did brisk business next door. Meat shops selling the favourite South Asian meat, mutton, dotted the main avenue, and many of them, in deference to Islamic and Sikh religious sentiments, made it a point to announce that they only stocked 'halal' meat. Certain culinary combinations would be completely inexplicable to anybody outside the Indian context, such as an eatery that proudly offered 'vegetarian and halal pizzas'.

I had lunch at the 'Chaat House', which was celebrating its thirtieth anniversary; a banner informed clients that when it opened in 1974 it was 'the first restaurant in the United Kingdom to introduce chaat to the western hemisphere', and that its existence was known not only all over the globe but also to Bollywood stars! (Such fame notwithstanding, the owner was—in consonance with another facet of the Indian ethos—quite willing to accept money without giving a bill, and such practices, I later learnt, are among the attractions of shopping at Southall.) Outside, the sound of people speaking in Punjabi and Gujarati, and of Hindi film songs, was ubiquitous, as was, by London standards, the

unacceptable filth, and noticeably, and embarrassingly, a familiar whiff of urine. Standard London features such as telephone booths were, if one cared to notice, different: none of them had photographs and telephone numbers of hookers, so common everywhere else in London, because of the conservative values brought in—and preserved—from India. A Hindu temple, a mosque and a gurdwara were noticeable features of the landscape. One traditional English pub, the Three Horses, looking completely incongruous in the midst of all this, seemed to have stood its ground but was in obvious neglect. For the rest, this part of London, with its ethnic majority of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, and a more recent fringe of black migrants of African origin, could have been a town in India, with Hindus and Muslims living in familiar juxtaposition, without any signs of tension, because here they were both collectively the 'other', conjoined by their common roots in the country of their forefathers.

Indians have settled in large numbers elsewhere in the UK, but Southall remains an eloquent metaphor to illustrate how ethnic minorities tend to congregate, and then, within that shared physical space, to preserve and perpetuate the certainties of their own culture. Bangladeshis in Brick Lane, Arabs around Edgeware Road and the Chinese in Chinatown near Soho—to cite only some prominent examples—have sought to do the same. The paradox, however, is that when in the midst of the majority community these very minorities often try to *erase* their cultural markers. Within themselves they are happy to be themselves; but outside the reassurance of people like us, they are conscious of the need to conform, to be more like *them*, to hide the difference so as not to appear incongruous or visibly different. In November 2004 Talat Ahmed, a student doing her doctorate at SOAS, came to see me. Of short build, slender and dark, she was wearing blue jeans and a sweatshirt, her black hair massed untidily on her forehead, very much like other youngsters in London. Her parents had migrated to the UK from India in the late 1950s, and she spoke to me of how initially the fact of their difference was a cause of great embarrassment for her. 'When my sisters and I were growing up in the sixties, we wanted to distance ourselves from everything that our parents stood for,' she said. 'We didn't want to eat curry every day; we didn't want to wear salwar-kameez; we didn't want to speak Urdu or

Hindi. I remember that when my mother came to pick us up from school we'd be embarrassed if she spoke in Hindustani. There were not so many children from South Asia in schools then. I think we were only five or six children who were not white. We were acutely self-conscious; we wanted to blend with the rest, to gloss over our difference.' Talat spoke without anger or bitterness, only recalling with clinical clarity what she felt in that phase of her life. 'Once my mother persuaded me to wear a salwar-kameez to school,' she remembered. 'It was a hot day and I can never forget that my teacher, who had never seen such a dress, actually came up to me and asked me if I would like to take off my trousers. I never wore a salwar-kameez again until I was in my thirties.'

A similar incident is mentioned by Bhikhu Parekh in his book *Rethinking Multiculturalism* published at the turn of the millennium. 'A couple of years ago when I was travelling by train in Britain,' writes Parekh, 'I was sitting opposite an elderly Pakistani couple and next to their adolescent daughter. When the crowded train pulled out of the station, the parents began to talk in Urdu. The girl felt restless and nervous and started making strange signals to them. As they carried on their conversation for a few more minutes, she angrily leaned over the table and asked them to shut up. When the confused mother asked why, the girl shot back, "Just as you do not expose your private parts in public, you do not speak in *that language* in public."' The emphatic reaction took Parekh aback, but he could understand what prompted it. 'Though no one presumably had told her so', the girl knew, Parekh reasoned, 'that the public realm belonged to whites, that only their language, customs, values, bodily gestures and ways of talking were legitimate in it and that minority ethnic and cultural identities must remain confined to the private realm'. Early Jewish immigrants to Europe and the USA also felt 'deeply embarrassed if their parents spoke Yiddish in public, wore traditional dress or performed their religious and other ceremonies in public'.[2]

The problem, of course, is that however strong the desire to be subsumed in the dominant culture, some aspects of identity cannot be erased. If you are coloured, you cannot be white; if your mother tongue is not English, you will speak the Queen's language in an accented fashion, or lapse into your own in 'embarrassing' ways; if

your religion is different, certain symbols of its practice will surface; if your name is Indian, it will sound different and attempts to give it an Anglo-Saxon abbreviation will not always work. Ravi Mirchandani, the UK editor of my previous book, *Being Indian*, had come to the UK when very young; he had gone to school here, and was pale to look at because his mother was English. For all practical purposes he was, and wanted to be, part of the white mainstream. But his name was a dead giveaway. For some reason, not clear even to himself, he did not want to be called Paul, his pet name; but Mirchandani was more than an unpronounceable mouthful for his English friends, and marked him forever as different.

Being different is *not* being separate. A polity genuinely aspiring towards a multicultural society should strive to give these differences space, but tolerance cannot obliterate the fact of difference. The insistence of the Sikhs on wearing their turbans, which has religious sanction for them, is a case in point. In the UK they successfully fought for their right to do so, and the law was amended in 1976 allowing them to wear their turbans in lieu of crash helmets. In Canada, the struggle was more protracted. Unlike other police forces in the country, the elite Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) was adamant in not allowing its Sikh recruits their headgear. When the RCMP finally relented, a group of Canadians protested the decision vociferously, and took the matter right up to the Supreme Court, which fortunately dismissed the case. In France, however, the turban is still proscribed in schools. The French political tradition comes close to believing that minorities do not exist. All citizens must accept the French nation, and embrace that supreme nation state's definition of French culture. The absence of flexibility in such a paradigm makes little emotional appeal to the ethnic minorities, the migrants of former colonies, whose numbers in France, as in the UK, are substantial—as high as six per cent of the population.

Against the many things that underline what is common to all of humanity, there are as many which reveal divergences. People coming from different cultural backgrounds can be different in a bewildering variety of ways, and sometimes this can border on the comical. The writer Upamanyu Chatterjee told me of an Indian woman bureaucrat who was keeping the Karva Chauth fast during an official visit to

Paris. The fast requires the devout Hindu wife to fast through the day and eat and drink nothing till she has sighted the moon in the evening. In the cloud-laden sky of Paris it was not easy to do so. Very thirsty and hungry after a day of work, she set off in desperation for the roof of her hotel where, she reasoned, the moon would be more accessible. Unfortunately, this part of the hotel was not open to guests, and in opening the door at the rooftop, she set off an alarm. The French police were there in a jiffy. Much confusion and consternation followed, since the lady's French was poor. But even had her French been excellent, the estimable members of the gendarmerie would have still found it hard to believe that all she wanted to do was to frame the moon in a sieve before breaking a fast she had kept for the longevity of a husband who was several thousand miles away in Delhi, where the moon would have risen several hours earlier! They promptly arrested her and were wondering which psychologist to consult when someone from the Indian embassy with a better grasp of French and diplomacy managed to bail her out.

The interesting thing is that there was much in common between the distressed lady and her French interlocutors. All of them were educated; she knew something about France, and they about India; everyone on that hotel roof had CNN and McDonald's and so much else of a global vocabulary in common. Yet rituals of this nature can be very difficult to understand for an outsider. Certain patterns of behaviour are rooted in a unique cultural milieu and will make little sense to someone not born into that milieu. Mike Bryan, the Penguin CEO in India, once told me that although he had tried to adapt to Indian ways and habits in the few months that he had been in Delhi, he was still taken by surprise when his Indian friends put their other palm over clasped hands in a handshake, as if to add greater warmth to the greeting. In South Asia it is perfectly normal for two male friends to embrace when they meet, and the physical reticence of the formal handshake that is very British is largely alien to Indians, even to those with half a lifetime of western education behind them. Sonal Mansingh, the celebrated classical dancer, argues that cultures are intuitive and their reference points for those born to them can be understood on a pan-national scale. 'If I stand in the tribhanga posture, anybody in any village in India will know that I am portraying Krishna,' she once

commented. 'But to anyone not from this soil everything has to be explained to the nth degree.' Symbols, meanings, gestures, expressions, behavioural patterns, values—these constitute a common code of comprehension which is learnt almost by osmosis. It can never become fully transparent to those not born naturally to a culture, often even when they have spent a great many years studying it. The sense of otherness can be reduced, but not entirely eliminated. Some element of curiosity or bewilderment or surprise will perpetually shadow an outsider, and he or she will never be capable of the same degree of spontaneity and effortlessness which comes so naturally to those who belong. In the world of cultures not everything is porous, and not everything can be synthesized.

Even today in the UK, the attitudinal differences born of divergent cultural perspectives and beliefs can cause bewilderment and friction. In June 2007, a British employment tribunal awarded £4000 to Bushra Noah, a Muslim teenage hairdresser from Acton in West London, as compensation for 'injury to feelings' after she was refused a job for wearing her headscarf. There was behind this seemingly minor incident the classic opaqueness of cultures. Sarah Desrosiers, who owned the Wedge Salon at King's Cross in Central London, could not for the life of her understand how a person who insisted on wearing a headscarf could be in the hairdressing trade. 'I never in a million years dreamt that somebody would be completely against the display of hair and be in this industry,' she is reported to have exclaimed. For Bushra, on the other hand, there was no contradiction at all. The headscarf was her personal badge of identity; it had a symbolism and a meaning that she was not willing to discard. She did not see why this should mean that she could not style her clients' hair in the 'funky and urban' image desired by her employer.

In the summer of the same year, Sarika Singh, a fourteen-year-old Sikh girl in Wales, took the Aberdare Girls' School to court for not allowing her to wear a kara, the steel bangle that is an essential marker of identity for every practising Sikh. The school bans its students from wearing any jewellery other than wrist-watches or plain ear studs. Sarika, who began to wear the kara after a visit to India in 2005, saw her expulsion as an assault on her faith. 'I never thought I would be forced by a school to choose between my religion and my education,'

she protested. Her petition was backed by 150 gurdwaras and 250 Sikh organizations, as also the UK human rights group Liberty.

It is a tribute to British policies that such cases of discrimination have a hearing and often receive support beyond partisan lines. Yet, for every such battle won or waged, there are perhaps a thousand instances of discrimination and racism that go unreported or uncontested. In the early years, as we have discussed, the expression of racism was stark. Talat Ahmed remembers how her father and uncle would talk about incidents where they were abused as 'Paki bastards'. Ravi Mirchandani can never forget that one of his English schoolmates would refuse to hold his hand on the playing field. Usha Kiran, an Indian teacher in the government school at Southall, told me that until as late as the 1970s the white lady who headed the school did not encourage Asian parents to come inside the school premises; parents were expected to leave their children at the school gate. Old timers in Southall recall that there was a time when white shopkeepers would not allow Asians to touch the fruit and vegetables. Even when laws to ensure racial equality had been put in place, the means to subvert them were manifold. For instance, when Usha Kiran posted her first application for a teaching job, the school authorities said they had not received it. She learnt that this was not an uncommon response if the receiving clerk was white.

There is no doubt that such incidents have become less frequent and less blatant, partly because of the conscious government policy to promote multiculturalism, but also because of the financial muscle and confidence acquired by the minorities. Today, far from being unwelcome in shops, Asian customers are valued. They can touch whatever is on display, check and choose what they wish to buy, and all shopkeepers, whatever the colour of their skin, have no option but to be polite. And of course, it is dangerous to form facile stereotypes. The truth often comes in shades of grey. When Usha Kiran applied the next time for a teaching job, she did so in person, obtained a receipt, and got an interview call. At the interview she found that an Indian lady—someone she knew—was sitting in as the representative of the Equal Opportunity Commission. She got the job. Later, the white head of her school was most supportive, and gave her an independent class to teach much sooner than she expected. There was a time, Usha says,

when she could not even think of going to work in a salwar-kameez or sari. Today, no one notices such things.

And yet, it is important to remember that the tendency among people to bring to your attention, in a derogatory way, the fact of your difference is not always something that the law can correct. And the manner in which it is done cannot always be quantified—though, however tangential or subtle or indirect or insidious the form of its expression, the person at the receiving end is never in doubt. Kunal Basu, the Indian author of the *The Miniaturist* and *The Opium Clerk*, and his wife Susmita joined us for dinner one evening in London. Jay Panda, the young member of Parliament from Orissa was there too. Both Jay and Kunal were educated in the USA. Jay had lived there for seven years. Kunal had stayed on for twenty. Both of them felt that it was far easier for an Asian to merge into the multi-ethnic landscape of America. New York and Los Angeles, Jay said, were actually non-white-majority cities. But the ethos in these coastal cities was different to what prevailed in the conservative hinterland, where non-white outsiders were often looked upon with suspicion and curiosity and sometimes with hostility. Kunal, who now teaches corporate governance at Templeton College in Oxford, said he was far more conscious of his status as the 'other' in England than in the USA. His Asianness was often used as a badge in his department because he was the only coloured person on the faculty. The cover of any brochure brought out by the faculty would carry his picture, invariably there to stress the college's commitment to a multicultural Britain. But behind that projection was often another reality of deep-seated prejudices and notions of racial exclusiveness. In one meeting of college dons, the chairperson said: 'We must do what we say. After all, we are white people.' Kunal said that he had protested, but the convictions that could lead to such a remark were not really shaken.

Jaishree Misra, who works in the British film classification office, and is a well-known writer in English, mentioned to me that there are some ways in which a person can use your difference to make you feel inferior which, even if the intent is not always malicious, can be offensive. For instance, one of her white colleagues in the office always lapsed into a vaguely comical Indian-English accent when talking to her, despite having worked with Jaishree for some years. Did she do

it because she thought she would be more comprehensible? Was it an unconscious reflex, stemming from years of having to interact with people who were not born to English? Was it resentment at the success of an outsider claiming to be an equal with those born English? It could be any of these, but Jaishree confessed that it offended her.

Some forms of behaviour infringe no law; they range from condescension and ridicule to smugness and callous humour, all of which are difficult to define precisely or to anticipate. One incident that illustrates this involved Jaishree again. On a crisp and sunny September morning my wife and I accompanied her and her husband Ashutosh on the Duck tour of London. The tour involves a ride through the city on an amphibian bus which after showing passengers the usual tourist spots makes a dramatic splash into the Thames for a short ride down the river. The tour guide, a lady who announced her name as Tracy, appeared to be in her forties and spoke with a very cockney accent quite incomprehensible to my native ears. She was average looking, somewhat large on the hips, and had her hair tied up untidily in a bun. Her commentary was full of jokes, tired and not exceptionally bright, only provoking the occasional titter in some of the passengers. (A young Indian couple, however, laughed the loudest, as though trying to prove that they were not outsiders to the very English context of her humour.) The bus driver was a young man, shy and of a slight build, dressed very ordinarily and with a beard. He could have been Sri Lankan or Indian or from Bangladesh or Pakistan. The woman took great pleasure in making him part of her jolly—at least to herself—routine. She would sing a song, and then thrust the mike in front of his face for the chorus line or the punchword. Or she would suddenly turn to him and ask him a question, and as he fumbled for a response or looked embarrassed she would laugh and expect the passengers to do the same. I don't think she was trying to be deliberately racist, but obviously she did not give much value to the dark man's discomfiture, which she was certain—this much was clear to us—he would not make evident. At the end of the tour, she walked down the aisle, asking passengers which country they were from. To me she said: 'Are you from Sri Lanka?' I said I was from India, to which she burst into the song *'Chal chal meri hathi'*, the words almost unrecognizable in her cockney accent.

People react differently to the possibility of being marked out as different. Amit Choudhuri, the hugely talented writer in English, once told me that he left Oxford, where he lived and taught, for home in Kolkata the year his daughter was born. He wanted her to grow up among her own, he said, where she would belong, and where the pigment of her skin would not set her apart from the numerical mainstream. But most people stay on in the adopted country, and for them the issue of preserving the culture that has shaped them remains a principal preoccupation, even when they don't acknowledge the struggle that this entails. Strange compromises emerge in the process, as for instance in the way arranged marriages are still negotiated by the Indian community. The Arya Samaj Mandir in London runs a marriage bureau where on paying £30 any member can benefit from the matrimonial service run by the temple. Basic particulars about the girl or the boy—family, caste, education, occupation and height—are circulated. The first contact is made by the parents, usually over the phone. If they connect and approve of each other, the boy will call the girl. If things look compatible thus far, the boy will ask to meet the girl. The two will then meet, with the full knowledge of both sets of parents. Such meetings could take place over many weeks. At this point the parents would expect to have a decision. If it's yes, the girl's parents will call on the boy's, carrying fruit and mithai and some jewellery as a token of the engagement that will follow. It is an amazingly choreographed act, creating the space for traditional structures to operate in a dramatically different milieu. Even second- or third-generation British Indian children, who have internalized the western freedoms in such matters, agree to these rituals, and marry into Indian families, often into the same caste.

Another interesting example of this curious hybridity is the Glassy Junction bar at Southall. A notice outside the premises proudly announces: 'First Pub to Accept Ruppees [sic] as Currency'. Inside, the familiar features of a British pub are there, but Punjabiized beyond recognition. Pictures of rural Punjab showing green fields and bullock carts and tractors mix with photographs of bhangra Indi-pop icons and film stars. A lifesize portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh takes up a wall. The names of prominent towns in Punjab—Patiala, Ludhiana, Bhatinda—define seating areas. Rustic lads holding cues in their hands crowd around snooker tables. Indi-pop singers scream out of television screens. The snacks are tandoori chicken legs and sheekh kebabs. The bar counter has acquired an Indian idiom, with shiny glass and brass replacing the traditional English wood. The beer is English, but several of the whiskies are Indian brands, such as Kuch Nahin and Chak de Phatte. There are no women, but 'exotic dances', a poster tells us, can be seen on Thursdays at 8 p.m. and on Sundays at 7 p.m. Prem, my brother-in-law, whose Punjabi is up to par, asks what is meant by 'exotic dances'. The waiter grins. 'Why don't you come and see for yourself?' he parries. Prem comes to the point: 'Are they *nanga* dances?' The waiter's grin is wider. He nods.

Sandeep, my nephew who was born in London, told me that several establishments in the city have been set up by Indians exclusively for themselves. There are 'members only' private clubs like Panthers in Alperton and Ghunghat in Sudbury. A new nightclub—Masti—has recently opened in Wembley. Bang opposite Glassy Junction is Southall's biggest gurdwara, the Guru Sri Singh Sabha. I could see devotees eating langar in cavernous halls, and women and children with their heads covered and bent in prayer. I wonder if some of the men go straight to the gurdwara after watching the 'exotic dances' in Glassy Junction.

Religion is at the core of the issue of identity. Even in the lives of those who deny its importance, it lurks at the periphery, dormant but rarely extinct. Especially among the ethnic minorities, its influence is pervasive. The mosque, the muezzin and the madrasa have acquired a new importance for Muslims after 9/11. They see their religion and its civilizational values under attack, and in the face of derogatory stereotyping of all Muslims as closet terrorists or fundamentalists, many among them are provoked to defiantly reassert their religious loyalties. One fall evening Bhikhu Parekh invited me over to the House of Lords (of which he is a member) to talk about the issue of religion and identity, a subject on which he has done a great deal of work. Parekh, diminutive, with a white beard, has an exceptionally bright mind; logical, incisive and soft spoken, he is eclectic and open

to another's point of view in the best tradition of scholarship, but by no means a pushover. He took me around the august house, showing me the gold and braid excesses of its different rooms. In one of these was a huge painting of Nelson in battle, the great admiral leading his sailors on to victory. Parekh pointed out that there was only one Negroid face in the picture; if one looked closely enough one could espy an Arab face as well, but there was no Indian to be seen which was, Parekh said, a rather grievous omission since there was almost no war that had been won by the British without Indian soldiers dying for the Empire. Another room proudly depicted the virtues with which the British would like to be identified: mercy, faith, justice and so on. Parekh's wry comment was that these were the virtues of an imperial power, of a nation that ruled the world.

We sat in the Peers Dining Room, chatting over a civilized cup of tea, the beautiful room buzzing with Their Lordships and their guests, a large oil painting of Saint John looking steadily at me. I talked to Parekh about the matter of religious and cultural identity in multi-ethnic western societies. Parekh felt that the French were being too abrasive in dealing with minority issues, such as the question of allowing Muslim women to wear the hijab. The British were more indulgent, he said, perhaps because they were themselves constituted of three nations. It wasn't really colour that was the biggest issue now. Black people posed a lesser problem in the perception of the British people; there the only issue was that of colour. With Indians the problem has been that they also carry the baggage of a well-defined and ancient culture. They cannot be so easily assimilated. Margaret Thatcher, Parekh said, was clever. She was no enlightened, tolerant soul, but she appreciated the fact that Indians were entrepreneurs, with the same Victorian values of parsimony and hard work as the British. She also felt that in due course their domestic culture would be partially neutralized by education. And at least in the case of the Hindus among British Indians, despite their strong culture, they have indeed been a relatively invisible minority. Politically they are quiescent. They may have strong and different cultural traditions within their homes—though these are eroding with succeeding generations—but the only overt manifestations are their temples and the annual chanting of the Krishna Consciousness followers at Trafalgar Square. As a

minority, Hindus don't number more than about half a million. Most of them belong to middle-class homes; small families have become the norm; they don't proselytize, and, if anything, as Parekh said, 'we may lose a few through conversions to Christianity due to inter-religious marriages'. The Sikh British Indians, too, though not as invisible, are not insistently assertive of their identity outside of their limited private spaces.

Essentially, the British don't have to redefine their own identity as a result of Indian presence. Indians number only 1.2 million, which works out to less than 2 per cent of the population. But the ethnic minorities as a whole are a sizeable 7.6 per cent, and the question of how to make them an assured part of the mainstream will not go away easily. *That* is the real problem. Europe, Parekh argued, has no tradition of diversity. The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended a century and a half of bloody religious warfare in Europe, created nation states on the basis of language, culture and religion. They aren't comfortable with genuine diversity which involves differences of culture and faith. Islam, particularly, with its increasingly politicized and insistent search for identity and recognition, will be a cause of unease in all such nation states, and perhaps lead to a clash with conservative Christians.

In this context it is also useful to remember that only 10 per cent of the British population has ever really supported with conviction the policy of multiculturalism. And things only get worse, given this statistic, when multiculturalism is carried too far. In a school in London with a majority of Bangladeshi students, the problem was that many children missed several days of school when they accompanied their parents on more than one visit every year to the home country. To deal with this, the educational authorities decided to open a branch of the school in Dhaka so that the children do not miss out on classes. This was perhaps excessive, Parekh smiled, for there is always the danger that the 'principle of cultural defence' will be taken too far.

Usha Kiran gave me another example of multiculturalism 'taken too far', which is also an example of how gestures of excessive 'accommodation' are never a substitute for genuine understanding of and respect for cultural difference. By the mid-1980s the new policy of multiculturalism did not insist on schools only propagating the Christian faith. In Usha's school, one assembly per week is now devoted to

religious education; any religion can be invoked, the aim being to emphasize the elements universal to all religions. A Muslim father, with one boy and five girls in the school, objected to his children learning about other religions. He asked that his children be exempted from the assembly. The school agreed. His daughters come to the school in a chador. Usha asked whether they could remove their chadors during the physical education class, because she was afraid that they might trip and fall. The father wanted to know if boys would be present in the class. She said yes; after all, the school was co-educational. He refused, though the girls were not more than five or six years of age. The teachers then found a solution: the girls would wear their chadors even during physical class, but their veils would be held back with a pin. This kind of obdurateness, which would test the patience of any policy of multiculturalism, is not the preserve only of Muslims. There are Indian parents who will not learn to speak English and will demand a Punjabi- or Gujarati-speaking teacher to interpret for them. The school provides them.

When it comes to the question of faith, the challenges can be greater, because it is often so central to identity. Hindus in Britain may not have the religious stridency of some of their Muslim friends, but the primacy of faith should never be underestimated. The Hindu temple at Neasden in London has to be seen to set at rest any doubts in this matter. Sadhu Atmaswarup Das, the mahant or head of the temple, telephoned me one day, quite unexpectedly. He wanted to meet me, and since I was keen to visit the temple myself, we agreed that Renu and I would come across the very next day. Atmaswarupa Das was a middle-aged man and spoke good English, not surprising since he was a product of one of the prestigious IITs in India and had worked for a prominent private firm before he gave it all up to join the order. He apologized that he would not be able to meet Renu, since his strict vows of celibacy prohibited him from even looking at women. He assured me, however, that all arrangements would be made to show her around the temple. His extreme celibacy did seem a bit strange to both of us; all the gods in the temple premises were depicted with their beautiful consorts—Krishna with Radha, Shiva with Parvati, Brahma with Saraswati and Vishnu with Shri. Obviously, what the gods cherished was not for Das.

Prafulla, the aide assigned by Das to show us around the premises, was a short young man in his twenties, with his hair cropped close and an eager but nondescript face. He wore trousers and a shirt and, somewhat incongruously, a tie with the words 'BAPS' printed in small letters across it. BAPS stood for Bochanswami Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha, the name of the organization which ran the vast Swaminarayana Hindu Mission all over the world. Prafulla kept up a running commentary as he took as around. With six domes and nine pinnacles rising seventy feet high, the temple in shimmering marble, with intricately carved pillars and ornate ceilings, has been built to make a statement of grandeur. Prafulla told us that 2828 tonnes of Bulgarian limestone and 2000 tonnes of Italian Carrara marble were shipped to India to be carved by 1500 craftsmen and then reshipped to London. In all, 26,300 carved pieces were assembled like a giant jigsaw in three years by over a thousand volunteers. The haveli, which is the traditional annexe to temples in Gujarat, and from where we had commenced our guided tour, was built entirely in Burmese teak and British oak. The whole surface was exquisitely carved, and must be one of the finest examples of such work anywhere, including India.

Prafulla informed us that the temple complex has entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the 'largest traditional Hindu mandir outside India'. He spoke with obvious pride, as if he was a part of a new movement to restore Hindu glory, and no detail—such as the fact that the 22,600-square-foot foundation, requiring 225 truckloads of cement, was laid in a single day—was too small in this historically ordained process. He had his facts all ready, and rattled them off without pause. Since the temple was built, over half a million visitors had entered its portals; 5000 devotees visit it every week; on festivals as many as 50,000 visit it in one day; over 20,000 schoolchildren marvel at it every year. Prafulla's eyes really lit up when he took us to the museum which projects the achievements of the Hindu faith, including its contribution to mathematics, astronomy, medicine and education. It has a separate panel on Sanskrit, which is described as the mother of all languages. A great many gizmos are harnessed to project these messages, with 3-D miniature dioramas showcasing Sita and Shravana, and other 'heroes of the Hindu faith'.

We were at a bit of a loss to define our reactions to 'Neasden's Taj

Mahal', as one British newspaper called it. Obviously, the temple is architecturally impressive, although perhaps the desire for monumental grandeur is overdone. Some in the British media have described it as 'hallucinogenic', while others have thought that the overdose of carvings makes it look like 'frothy milk on a cappuccino'. Quite clearly, the temple is motivated by a desire to project the Hindu faith, not so much to believers but to outsiders who need to be educated about and impressed with the glories of Hinduism. The attempt is to go back to a period when India was unsullied by foreign occupation, prior to the coming of the Muslims and the English, when Hinduism and its offshoot, Buddhism, were the reigning religions and inspired a cultural renaissance. The exhibition on Hinduism has panels depicting the breakthroughs in science that took place then: the word geometry has its origins in the word Gyaamiti, which means measuring the earth; the concept of geometry emerged in India in 1000 BC, a good 700 years before Euclid; trigonometry was discovered in India in the treatise of *Surya Siddhanta*, written in the fourth century AD, 600 years before similar concepts were introduced in Europe; the value of the pi was first developed in India; Pythagoras' theorem was worked out in India as far back as the sixth century BC, and so on.

To those who devised the exhibition, the important thing was to assert the superiority of Indian civilization, not only in the field of metaphysics or religion, but also in those 'secular' areas where the west had always claimed superior status. To reclaim self-worth only in the field of spirituality—which the west was perhaps willing to accept—was not enough. The pinnacles and friezes and elaborate carvings and domes were there not so much to facilitate the possibility of salvation as to give Hindus a symbol of pride, something to make their presence felt in Britain. The need for recognition was the prime motivator, and the temple brochure highlights what Prince Charles or Tony Blair or Richard Branson had to say after their visit. Significantly, and entirely in accordance with what the temple authorities would have wanted, Prince Charles speaks less about his spiritual experience and more about how the complex is an 'exciting and noble addition to the landscape of London', Tony Blair exults that he has 'never seen such a magnificent work of modern architecture', and Branson describes it as 'one of the wonders of the world' and how, as a result, the 'impact of the Hindu religion has only begun to be felt in Britain'. There was, it struck me, a historical irony in all of this. When in India, the British had used architecture—the construction of New Delhi and the monumental Viceroy's Palace—to impress and awe the natives, and now the immigrant Indians were using the very same tool—albeit on a much smaller scale—to impress the natives in England.

The Neasden temple is a monumental metaphor, not only for the pivotal role of faith in the lives of people, but for the need—so pervasive among minorities—to be acknowledged and to acquire visibility. There is in the migrant a basic urge to assert the familiar, reflecting his own articles of faith and respect. Within his congregation or ghetto this is easily done, but outside not many opportunities present themselves, and some of them are not half as effective as the grandiose pinnacles of Neasden. In Stratford-upon-Avon, the town where Shakespeare was born, Indians have managed to instal a bust of our very own bard—who else but Tagore! It is an incongruity and an imposition, and is seen as such. Apparently Tagore had written a—rather nondescript—poem on Shakespeare. This was fished out to be inscribed on the bust's plinth. Tagore had himself translated it into English, but the consensus is that it does both Shakespeare and him little justice. The bust stands plainly incongruous and ignored in an unimportant garden facing a row of toilets. Many visitors apparently ask what a bust of Marx is doing in the hometown of Shakespeare!

In spite of such ludicrous efforts, many Indians have successfully negotiated the space between their own markers of identity and the mainstream, and are happy to be considered British. But it is still a revelation to see how much of their reinvented lives as successful British citizens continue to be anchored in India or Indian sensibilities. Dr Khalid Hameed, now a member of the House of Lords, and a former CEO of the prestigious Cromwell Hospital in London, is one such success story. To hear how it all happened I met him for lunch at the Dorchester Grill, perhaps one of London's most expensive restaurants. It was on a cold December day, and although I had to walk only a few hundred yards from my home on South Audley Street

to reach the Dorchester, I was quite frozen without an overcoat. Dr Hameed arrived in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes and together we walked into the Grill, where the deferential behaviour of the staff showed that he was not an infrequent guest.

As the CEO of Cromwell Hospital, Dr Hameed was the first and only Asian to head a major British hospital. He came to England in 1968 as a young doctor for further studies. His father, Dr Abdul Hameed, was one of the leading doctors of Lucknow. Khalid was being groomed to continue the family name in medicine. 'But I was just enjoying myself too much to think of going back,' Khalid said. 'I was working in a university hospital, teaching while I was learning, and did not want to go back in a hurry.' Then he met his wife, who was British. Khalid must have been a good-looking man. Even now, when he must have crossed sixty, he is exceptionally well preserved, the receding hairline more than offset by a trim physique and trendy and expensive suits. In the 1980s his marriage ran into trouble. Three children were involved, and the divorce was long and acrimonious. Much to his father's regret, his return to India became even more remote.

Through all of this Khalid was doing very well professionally. He had a large house in Hampstead, some of the top firms in Britain were his clients, he drove an expensive car and was on the board of Cromwell Hospital. His big break came in 1990. Cromwell was losing money. Its debts totalled over forty million pounds, and the banks were unwilling to lend more than eight million. A crisis meeting of the board was called, and each director was asked to suggest a way out. Khalid wrote a short paper advocating a combination of financial measures and more aggressive marketing. The board nominated him to be the CEO to implement his plan. Although Khalid did not mention it on his own, the fact that the Sultan of Abu Dhabi was one of the chief investors in the hospital might have played a role in his selection. But what really mattered was that Khalid turned Cromwell around. In a short time the hospital came into the black, and today it makes a profit. The boy from Lucknow went on to become the longest serving CEO of a major British hospital. His father is no more. Khalid has married again, this time the beauteous Ghazala, who too hails from India. London has finally become home, although he permanently

maintains, he confided proudly, a full complement of staff at his home in Lucknow. 'When I retire, I want to spend the winter months in Lucknow,' he says with a smile.

The Queen has conferred the CBE on Dr Hameed. The Indian government had conferred on him the Padma Shri, but he wanted it to be upgraded to a Padma Bhushan, and managed to have that done in 2008. Khalid's new passion is to rally Muslims into a true understanding of Islam so that they can say no to the call of terrorism. He wants to encourage a greater interfaith dialogue to highlight the compassion which is the basis of all religions. I told him that he should expect a nomination to the House of Lords, and that too happened a year later.

Sir Ghulam Noon, who set up Noon Products, the highly successful business which supplies the bulk of ready-to-microwave Indian food in the UK, was born in Mumbai some sixty years ago. His father, who died when Ghulam was only eight, owned a small mithai shop opposite the busy Crawford Market. Ghulam could have continued with the family business in a routine way but he was impatient to do more. In 1964 he opened a branch of Royal Sweets in London with partners in Southall, and set up a small factory to supply confectioneries. In the late 1970s he signed a contract with British Airways to supply 'Asian vegetarian meals', a sign of the growing number of people from the Indian subcontinent travelling on the carrier. But at this stage the UK was far from becoming his home. Mumbai was still 'home', and he spent a number of years in America trying to do business. It was only in 1983 that he moved to Britain on a more permanent basis.

Noon was concerned about the quality of Indian food available in the supermarkets in the UK. He felt it was insipid, badly packaged, and poorly marketed. His conviction was that food produced on the conveyor belt could still be tasty, and reflect the culinary traditions of excellence which he had grown up with. Frozen foods were not the best format, he felt, for Indian cooking. Microwaves were then just making their advent, and Noon wanted to ride on this technology to reach tasty mass-produced Indian cooking to the ordinary man. Guided by this vision he set up Noon Products in 1987, and never looked back.

Ghulam Noon's several factories today produce over 300,000 meals a day retailed in leading British supermarkets like Sainsbury and

Waitrose. He employs 800 workers who work in two shifts from six in the morning to 9:30 at night. His annual turnover exceeds £50 million, and he has become the biggest employer in Southall where he has as many as eight factories. The bulk of his employees are Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis Sri Lankans and Somalis, and some whites, representing quite accurately the population mix of Southall. His factories have adapted meticulously to the exacting hygiene standards of the UK. To enter the factory floor I had to don an overall, put on a mask, wear a hat, take off my shoes, slip into green gumboots and wash my hands several times along the way. Prince Charles, who inaugurated the complex in June 2003, had to wash his hands six times before he could see the chicken tikkas on the conveyor belts, and is believed to have said that he had never been through such a regimen before. As I walked down from the changing room, looking like someone from outer space, my guide pointed out that the walls are covered with a micro band resin that has zero tolerance to bacteria. On the floor I saw huge vat pans—specially designed by Noon—which can process 200 kilograms of chicken or lamb at one go. In an adjoining room, which is the all-important spice department, I was introduced to a kindly middle-aged lady who supervised the preparation of forty-six different spices, each measured to a decimal. The spices are brought in from India, hand cleaned and ground to specifications, and carefully monitored to prevent variation in strength and quality. Other ingredients are sourced from all parts of the world. For instance, by 5 a.m. every morning, 25 tonnes of chicken breasts arrive from Holland. They are diced the same day, cooked and chilled by evening, and sold within twenty-four hours.

After my visit to the production floor, and after I extricated myself from the mask and hat and overalls and gumboots and felt human again, Noon and I sat down to a relaxed lunch in his private dining room. 'The British people have been very good to me,' he reflects. 'It is not that I have not seen any racism. But I have never bothered. My mother used to say: when an elephant walks dogs will bark, but the elephant does not bother. In this country, if you have fire in your belly you will succeed. You do not require to cultivate anyone but just do your work honestly. Once you leave the shores of India, you have no option but to succeed. But while I worked hard, I got more in return in Britain than I would in my own country. There is no glass ceiling here. Even if there is, I broke it when I became a board member in 1995 of the Covent Garden Market Authority, the largest flower, fruit and vegetable market in the country. I was the first Asian to do so, and remained on the board for six years, the longest-serving member. I then became the president of the London Chamber of Commerce, the first non-white to hold this post in the 126 years since its inception. How can you say then that this country is racist?'

By now we had done good work of the excellent lamb curry and makhni dal, and were savouring the incredibly soft and succulent rasmalais, another product from the Noon commercial kitchen. 'Indians suffer from a ghetto mentality,' Noon said, with a vehemence that took me aback. 'They don't assimilate. Their only concerns are how big is your bar, how much jewellery your wife owns, what is the real size of your turnover. Or else, they only want to build temples, gurdwaras and mosques. The latest gurdwara built in Southall has cost seventeen million pounds. Is this the right use of our money? I am a Muslim, and I know that Muslims in the UK should focus on education. Education was a very dear cause to the Prophet. I want my grandchildren to point out and say: See, this school was built by my grandfather. I have no time for extremists like Hamza. He should be arrested and deported. The British are much too sharif, and needlessly afraid.'

I met Lord Meghnad Desai and his wife Kishwar on a February night in 2005 when a sudden cold snap had seen snow in London. Kishwar, whom I've known for many years, is a writer and television person who until her marriage to Meghnad in 2004 had lived almost entirely in New Delhi. With two grown-up children from a previous marriage in India, she had never really thought she would be married at this stage of her life to the much older Lord Desai and make London her home. But Meghnad, who met her in New Delhi when she was working in a publishing house and editing his book on the iconic film actor Dilip Kumar, pursued her with a zeal that she could not resist. Professor Emeritus at the London School of Economics, Meghnad looks easy-going, but is sensitive under the skin and has a razor-sharp mind. Marriage has not reduced his unabashed and happy rotundity but—like some latter-day Desdemona—Kishwar has pruned his

trademark halo of white hair. We sat over a relaxed drink in their book-lined living room decorated with flickering candles, old Hindi film songs playing in the background. Meghnad felt that the often heated debate about making immigration policies tougher was a transient phenomenon, ignited mostly by the Tories when elections were imminent. Most people in Britain, he said, had accepted the fact of ethnic minorities; their presence was no longer an issue for the inflammatory tabloids; the Hindus, like the Jews, had integrated substantially and adopted lifestyles congruent with the majority; and the presence of a confident right-wing mainstream party had diluted the raison d'être of extremist racist groups. 'Today, both the Labour and the Tory parties are right of centre, and even the Liberal Democratic Party is increasingly centrist,' he explained. What did he think, I asked him, about the project of multiculturalism. He answered immediately and without ambivalence. 'Multiculturalism tends to freeze communities wherever they are, and gives disproportionate powers to community leaders,' he said. I asked him whether a downturn in the economy would reignite dormant antipathies towards minorities. 'Maybe fifteen or twenty years ago I would have worried but not any more, unless the economic setback is very severe, which is unlikely,' he replied. 'My real worry is about the Muslim bottom rung, the Bangladeshis and the Pakistanis, who are on the fringes of the economy and are swayed by religious fundamentalism.'

Meghnad left India when he was twenty-one. 'I felt no great emotional wrench when I did so. I was happy, and thought to myself that at last my Indian chapter is behind me. I first went to the USA, to the University of Pennsylvania, where I did my doctorate. I then taught at the University of California in Berkeley. I became American, and when after a few years I came to the London School of Economics to teach, became British as easily.' He speaks softly, twirling his glass of red wine, stopping only to attack an olive or a crisp. 'I did not see myself as an Indian. I married an Englishwoman. We had three children. Nor did I come across racism. We lived in Chelsea and Hampstead. No faeces were ever put by white hooligans into my letter box. I gave up my Indian passport in 1976. We owned a holiday property in France. I suddenly realized that my children would not get medical cover in France with Indian passports. I gave up my Indian citizenship immediately. In fact, even before, in 1971, I had joined the Labour Party. In 1995 when I was made a member of the House of Lords, I made it clear that I did not want to be a community leader or the spokesman for the Gujaratis. I am British. This country gave me political rights the moment I arrived. As a citizen from a Commonwealth country, I could vote, and could, theoretically, be the prime minister of the country.' He pauses to sip his wine, and then laughingly adds: 'If the monarchy winds up, and I am convinced it will in my lifetime, I could be President!'

Lord Khalid Hameed, Sir Ghulam Noon, Lord Meghnad Desai—all of them successful in Britain, and happy to have British passports, but none of them able to jettison their Indian identity. As I have argued, identity has a 'stickiness' and cannot be got rid of simply by wishing it away. It has a grip over you even when you genuinely believe it is dispensable or easily substituted. Sometimes it can be suppressed to suit the company one is in; its markers can be diluted, pushed into the background, when one needs to appear more British and less Indian; accent, attire, food choices and lifestyles can be acquired to mimic the mainstream; one's own habits, customs, humour and way of life can be strategically repressed to camouflage differences. But in the end, the essence of identity is that it never really lets you forget where you come from. For all his years in the UK, Khalid Hameed remains a cultured Lucknawi and plans to spend half the year after retirement at his ancestral home in Lucknow which he continues to maintain. His home in London reflects these origins, as does the food he eats and the language he is most comfortable speaking. In fact, on a visit to India in 2008, he publicly lamented the excessive westernization of Indians in the UK at the cost of their culture and identity.[3] Ghulam Noon is genuinely grateful for the opportunities the UK gave him, but that gratitude has not made him any more British than he was when he came to Heathrow three decades ago. His businesses are located primarily in Southall. All the artwork and paintings in his gracious central London home and all the art objects in the reception lobby of his main factory are from India. His philanthropic work is focussed on a village in his home state of Gujarat, where he is building a hospital. He is most comfortable speaking Gujarati or Hindi, and speaks with

unmistakable nostalgia of 'home', which is Mumbai. Meghnad Desai may say that he never cared much for his Indian origins, but he is passionate about Hindi films and songs, has written a book on Dilip Kumar, and is writing another one with his wife on the legendary actress Nargis. Kishwar and he have bought a property in Goa, and the good Lord, while very much a member of the British Labour Party, writes a regular column in a leading Indian newspaper on politics in India. My wife and I were present when Kishwar and he were married at the Marlborough registration office in London. The ceremony was short and insipid, but we can never forget how Meghnad, after the registers were signed, pulled out a small pouch from his pocket. It contained sindoor, the vermilion powder that brides wear in India. And, in tribute to his roots, which he maintains mean very little to him, he took a pinch of the sindoor and put it in the parting of Kishwar's hair.

Of course, people from any part of the world have some things in common, but the elements that go to constitute their separate identities cannot be subsumed by some nondescript universalism. Cross-cultural appreciation is not the same as a successful crossover. Tagore won appreciation in the West; he won the Nobel Prize for literature; he spoke good English and, in fact, translated *Gitanjali* into English himself. But hardly anyone outside of academia and the Indian diaspora reads him in the UK. The essence of his poetry—its imagery and mood—is lost to the English native. This is understandable. Tagore's first language was Bengali, and the content of his writings was rooted permanently and unmistakably in India. His poetic imagery is rich with the romance of the east wind, the hum of the ektara, the call of the flute, and with references to moinapara meadows, ripe paddy fields gently swaying in the breeze, shefali flowers, tamal groves, and the ebb and flow of the Ganga. The lips of a woman for him can only be like the lotus, and the monsoon clouds remind him of the kajal in a woman's eyes. His life and his creative output were entirely about the spontaneity of inherited culture. Not surprisingly, he hardly wrote anything during his stay in England, although he had considerate and—especially after the Nobel Prize—many appreciative friends.

To gloss over divides with respect to culture and identity is as naïve as to argue that they are unbridgeable in every respect. There are

attributes that can be learned or accommodated, emulated or appreciated; but there are also differences which are immutable, fundamental, intrinsic and enduring, and which influence perceptions in everyday life. The dilemma of the migrant is that he has to make a choice—constantly and relentlessly—between what is his own and what is alien. He does not have the luxury of Tagore's assurance that comes from an unquestioned rootedness. In fact, his survival often depends on questioning that assurance and interrogating its relevance, because there is an unresolved disjoint between his way of life and the imperatives of the new milieu. This entails painful choices and mutilations, but the migrant welcomes (even if resentfully) his progressive co-option, because his past is a burden that needs to be shed for success in the present.

Subhash Chopra, a journalist who has written a book on Indo-British relations, came to see me one day in my office in London. He was a diminutive person in his early seventies, with bushy sideburns and long greying strands of hair at the back to make up for his obvious balding. He wore nondescript brown trousers and a grey checked shirt, with a button open in the fashion of the 1960s, when he had come to the UK as a young journalist, with no guarantee of a job or income. Work vouchers were easily available then, he said, but he never thought that the trickle of immigrants of his days would become the flood it became later. The creation of the Commonwealth had generated a fair amount of goodwill, and factories needed cheap labour, but Subhash's real motivation was—believe it or not—to visit the birthplace of Shakespeare. He did this soon after arrival, but while the homage to Stratford-upon-Avon fulfilled a long-cherished desire, it did not lead to a job. The newspaper business then was fairly racist; news agents would announce quite openly that coloureds were not welcome. Finally, an interview with Sir Harold Evans got him his job. Evans had visited India. He told Subhash that Ramnath Goenka, who was the proprietor of the *Indian Express*, the paper for which Subhash worked before he decided to take a leap into the dark, was a swindler. This, however, could not be held against Subhash, he said, and gave him the job.

Subhash worked as subeditor for the *Redding Evening Post*. In 1968, he married an Englishwoman whom he met at a leftist rally addressed

by Tariq Aziz. His marriage to a white woman brought him further into the mainstream. 'The sense of not belonging, of being an outsider, does not go away,' he told me, 'but once you've crossed the first hurdle, it becomes less. As an outsider you are under much more pressure to prove yourself. I changed jobs in quick succession. I went back to work in India for a year, and my wife came with me. But she didn't like it there. We had a son by now, and I returned with her.'

How far had Britain succeeded as a multicultural society, I asked Subhash. 'I think it is not a failure,' he said, pausing to reflect. 'But a lot of prejudice still remains. Things are changing with the younger generation. For my son England is home. Most of his friends are English. He is married to a white girl and has children. I know that even young Gujarati girls from very conservative families visit pubs in large numbers and wear western clothes like any other English girl. The older generation is still caught in a time warp, living in a kind of cultural ghetto, with the local temple as the pivot of social life. The Pakistanis are worse, refusing to change, and leading very insular lives. The British are not beyond racism, but who are Indians to criticize them? Indians are the most racist of all. They may marry a white person, but they will never marry a black. Even in Trinidad, where they have grown up with the blacks, they will never marry a black.

'Colour is a prejudice, and Indians are acutely aware of it because it is so important to them. Once Indians get to know a few white people, as friends or colleagues, it melts away quite a bit, but you can't rule it out, can't deny it. I think Britain is making a mistake by not following the example of France. Denominational schools need to be discouraged. Migrant communities must be encouraged to become a part of the mainstream. Many Asian migrants suffer from a self-inflicted injury by not learning the language. Elderly Punjabi and Gujarati women are specially cussed. They refuse to learn English and remain barricaded in their little worlds in Southall and Wembley. I'm glad that now those who apply for citizenship have to pass an exam in basic English.'

It has been over forty years since Subhash came to England for his tryst with Shakespeare. A lot has changed since. In 1982, on the street where he lives in Kenton Harrow, two-thirds of the residents were white; now, two-thirds are Gujarati. His marriage did not last too long, but he never remarried, and takes pride in his son and his grandchildren, who are effortlessly a part of British society. 'Ninety-nine per cent of those who say they will go back never do,' he says. But he has never given up his Indian passport. 'I will give up mine if everyone gives up theirs. Let us all have UN passports, beyond narrow nationalities,' he says.

Subhash's son, whose mother is English and who has married a white woman too, considers the UK his home. Subhash rejoices for his son, and is happy that he has found acceptability and is anchored in British society. But he remains a misfit himself. He has never gone 'back', but especially now that he is retired, spends several months every year in India. Like many others in his situation, he appears to spend his life in an uneasy penumbra, not fully able to belong to his adopted country and unable to return to the 'homeland'. Subhash's dilemma would be easily resolved if he could make a definite choice, one or the other, India or the UK, but this clarity is not available to migrants. He is condemned to live a life trying to find acceptance in the new while remembering the certainties of the old.

I remember Talat telling me, 'My father always wanted to be buried in India. He died a few years ago, and alas he is buried here.' But she was proud that for her, Britain is home. 'My sisters and I don't have any attachment to India, a country we hardly know. For my niece, England is even more so the only home she knows. She couldn't care less if someone does not like her native language or clothes. She can't get enough of Bollywood. She doesn't know the language too well, but she knows all the songs. When my sisters and I were growing up we were not interested in Indian cinema.' And yet, behind Talat's confident assertion lurks a desire to go back to her roots, or at least to know a little more about where she comes from. It is an urge that refuses to be obliterated. 'When I went to India last time, I visited my relatives,' she said. 'My mother had discouraged me from doing so, because my partner is white and was visiting with me. She said this would be quite shocking for her conservative Indian family. But finally I persuaded her to give me their addresses and telephone numbers. I went to Sambhal and Moradabad and Aligarh and met with aunts and uncles and cousins whom I had never met before. For the first time I got a sense of an extended family. For the first time I learnt that I too have

an ancestral village—Osmoli near Rampur—where my great-grandfather was born. For the first time I learnt of my mother as she was as a child. I knew her only as a mother and a wife, but now I learnt of all the pranks she was up to as a young girl. There were details about my family that came to me as a revelation. I learnt, for instance, that my dada and dadi had had a love marriage. My dadi was not a Muslim: she was a Brahmin lady from Bhopal.'

For reasons that she cannot fully understand herself, Talat has begun to learn both Hindi and Urdu. 'My mother is over the moon that I have begun to speak and to read Hindi and Urdu. She can now show me the letters her mother wrote to her. If I have children, I would like them to learn Hindi and Urdu. I'm glad that Britain is not America, where everyone is under great pressure to become Americanized and to be a part of the American way of life. Some people here have suggested, I know, that Britain too should try and impose a greater sense of Britishness on its ethnic minorities, but I would hate it if that happened.'

There was a somewhat ironical twist to the discussion when Talat mentioned that she was having problems getting a visa for India. Although her parents were born in India, and she was a British citizen, the problem had arisen because she was born in Karachi. Her mother was visiting her sister in Karachi when she was born. Her father had migrated to England from India at that time, and her mother joined him straight from Karachi. Under the existing rules, while her parents could get a long-term multi-entry visa without difficulty, because they were born in India and held British passports, she needed prior permission because she was born in Pakistan. The real irony was that her British partner who was born in Britain, and for whom she was the introduction to the land of her ancestors, could get a visa without any difficulty. I saw her eyes brim over as she told me all this, and in a sense her predicament symbolized in a rather extreme manner the plight of those who seek to reclaim their cultural past but are on the wrong side of the political fence. Here, indeed, was a rather poignant consequence of Empire, many decades after it had politically ceased to be: a father who spent almost a lifetime in England, but wanted to be buried in India; a mother who was born in India, lived in England, and had a connection with Pakistan because one of her daughters was born in Karachi; and a daughter for whom England was home but who wanted to discover her roots and was not getting a visa simply because her mother gave birth to her on the wrong side of the political fence that came up when the British left, their legacy having divided India into two nations.

Third-generation migrants, who were born in Britain and have very little direct or emotional contact with India, appear to be far more integrated into the mainstream. But it is not as if they have ceased to be conscious of the fact that some subtle but definite things set them apart. I have had discussions with many Asian youngsters. All of them claimed to feel at home but almost all, when probed deeper, confessed to a subconscious but enduring relationship—an attraction or attachment or yearning, they were hard put to define—with the country from where their parents or grandparents came. Also, for all their newfound affluence and greater sense of social integration, they were not unaware of the fact that they would continue to be treated by the majority as different. Such a sense of not fully or effortlessly belonging can find expression in a myriad undefined ways. For instance, Sandeep, whose family has now lived in the UK for over fifty years, told me that he is still worried when the person at the immigration counter at Heathrow is Asian or black. Coloured officials are far more difficult and aggressive than white staff because they *need* to overdo things in order to demonstrate their loyalty. Deepak, another young person of Indian origin, who represents the third generation of his family in the UK, said that he had many white British friends but socializing with them was mostly restricted to the pub. He rarely called them home, and nor did they invite him. When I probed him further, he confessed that there was a cultural 'barrier', and somehow he felt far more 'relaxed' fraternizing with 'his own people'. Ruchi, in her thirties and working for a leading human placement firm, said that she could easily party with her white friends; since she is fair by Indian standards, colour was not something that had bothered her. However, for all the genuine social camaraderie, she was never in doubt about her 'difference'. Sometimes this sense of being different annoyed her,

and she went out of her way to be 'like them'. One aspect of this was that she rarely provoked an argument or dissented from the dominant point of view.

Paradoxically, sometimes the same young people deliberately assert attributes that mark them out to be different. Unlike their parents or grandparents, whose insecurities compelled them to be as invisible as possible, the young are not so constrained. This is particularly the case with many young Muslims who resent the derogatory stereotyping of their religion and culture after 9/11, and are not inclined to quietly accept the injustice being meted out to Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine. This, of course, provides fertile ground to fundamentalists lurking in the corners of madrasas and mosques, but often the aggression is visceral and instinctive and has nothing to do with the preaching of the mullahs. Mala Sen, the noted writer and author of *Bandit Queen*, told me that after 9/11 there were many incidents where Muslim women in burqa were attacked by inebriated white louts; their veils were set on fire and they were compelled to take off the burqa. But the reaction of their teenage daughters, who had grown up in England and would therefore be expected to reject their mothers' old-fashioned choice of purdah, was unusual. They took to *wearing* the burqa in order to teach a lesson to the white trash that dared to harass their mothers. Symbols of orthodoxy, and indeed of tyranny, are often given a lease of life even by those committed to modern and progressive values, especially when they sense that these symbols are related to their identity in a milieu where that identity is being challenged.

Where Asians are in a majority, as in Southall, there is often a reverse racism. Usha Kiran recalls that a white teacher, who had taught in the school for years, was called a bitch in Punjabi by two young Indian men in Southall as she shopped for vegetables. The men were not used to seeing white customers. When they saw her, one of them asked: 'What is this white bitch doing here?' The lady understood what he had said because she knew Punjabi. She later mentioned this to Usha, saying that she was very hurt. Usha said that the men were boors, but added that they probably said what they did only because they were sure that she would not understand. The way people respond and react is often a far more accurate indicator of change than laws and political pronouncements.

Successful Indians in the UK now sometimes speak disparagingly of the whites: they don't work hard enough, show no initiative, are not resourceful, live too much on credit, have become too soft, prefer the easy life and lack business sense. This must mark a strange reversal. The British, as rulers, had similarly derogatory notions about Indians: the natives were lazy, venal, sunk in unmentionable superstition, incapable of leadership and only fit to be ruled. One of the constant gripes of the British was about the hot and sultry climate in India. The British were convinced that the enervating weather was greatly responsible for making Indians flabby, passive and unenergetic. Now some Indians argue that the constant grey and rain and cold are responsible for the congenital inadequacies of the British. Both allegations are without merit, but illustrate the underlying hostility and unease that often taints perceptions from across a cultural divide, no matter how long two cultures have been in close contact.

In the small basement auditorium of the British Film Institute in London, I spent one afternoon watching documentaries made by Asians. I was on the jury for the Satyajit Ray Memorial Award, given to a young Asian every year for short films. One film, made by a Bangladeshi director, was only three minutes in length. It was called 'A Place to Be'. The film, without any commentary, showed a Bangladeshi family at dinner in their modest London home. The faces could not be seen, but the conversation could be heard. The camera was still and unmoving, almost meant to be invisible, but intrusive nevertheless as it kept its gaze steady on the hands and the food and the serving and the eating. The food consisted of fish curry, rice and some vegetables. One could see it being ladled into plates. The family sat on the ground around a dastarkhan and everybody ate with their hands. The camera merely watched as plates were swabbed clean by fingers working dextrously and uninhibitedly. From a western point of view it was a messy process. Apart from me, the other members on the jury were all white British. I felt a little uncomfortable because the film was so stark in its portrayal of 'native' eating habits. The family ate as it would normally when in the privacy of its own space. But that normalcy was rarely ever exhibited to the 'outsider'. In the outsider's presence the same family would pick up a knife and fork in order to prove that it was not 'uncivilized' and had the requisite social graces.

This duality, which requires people to become practiced schizophrenics, is a burden a migrant has to live with. On the one hand is the persistence of his inherited way of life, and on the other the demands of officially correct behaviour, and between the two is an entire world of aspiration, shame, denial, camouflage, resentment and emulation.

Aggression, insecurity and deference are constant companions in this unresolved world. Paramjit Singh Gill, the young MP of Indian origin from Leicester, whose father came to the UK in 1962, spoke to me about the rampant racism when he was growing up. He became involved in student politics because you had to become political to challenge it and fight it, he said. Margaret Thatcher was rough on the minorities. She then saw the backlash from those who refused to be quiet victims. So she co-opted them into the system by setting up committees on race relations. But this did not really reduce the racist undercurrent in society, although it did assuage to some extent the anger among the minorities. The real change came about unintentionally, as it were, as a result of her privatization drive. Organizations which became private had to work to be financially viable; for this they needed to hire cheap labour which was efficient. This provided an opening for the ethnic minorities, especially Indians, because the hitherto state-owned bodies were large employers. The work is unfinished, says Paramjit. Some of the largest public utilities such as the National Health Service (NHS) are still not privatized. In his well-cut suit and fashionable rimless glasses the soft-spoken Gill is today a political star, but I could sense that behind his pleasant demeanour the memory of the struggles of the past were still very much alive. Unlike him, some young Asians have reacted to racism and ridicule, or to exclusion, in less mature, more violent ways.

Insecurity always shadows the ethnically apart, because anything can happen that may suddenly mark them out for reprisal or unwarranted attention. Young Asians in Britain today feel this more keenly perhaps than at any other time in recent years. After the 7/7 bomb blasts in London, all Muslims became marked as suspects, and even non-Muslim Indians became acutely conscious of their marks of identity. They could do nothing about the colour of their skin, but they were left in a dilemma about other attributes. Was a beard on a brown skin a red rag? Would a salwar-kameez attract hostile stares? Could a bindi play a protective role, establishing a Hindu identity? In the London of the 1990s and early 2000s, ethnic minorities had been getting used to being less reticent about displaying their cultural attributes. But now, in an atmosphere of terror, with all its attendant irrationalities, including the fear of a backlash by the bigots or boors in the white majority, Asians are seeking to hide their difference, and to somehow merge with the mainstream, at least in terms of their outward appearance. It is an act of self-defence, of preservation, but for entirely the wrong reasons.

And of course the deference towards the whites that is a legacy of colonialism is also very much alive among the coloured immigrants in Britain. The colonial rulers assiduously cultivated this deference. The Ugandan writer Norman Miwambo writes that 'when a person was punctual, strict in all his dealings and not corrupt, that person was referred to not as African but as British'.[4] A conscious contempt for the natives—which unfortunately a great many natives internalized—also helped in putting the whites on a pedestal. Many decades after the end of colonialism, aspects of that legacy persist. Young Asians and blacks in Britain do not admit to it, but often behind their swagger is an element of self-deception; deep inside, many of them continue to harbour an inferiority complex, although the manner of its expression may be less apparent or fawning. The elder generation is more honest. Yasmin Alibhai Brown, the only established brown columnist in the mainstream British press, is a migrant of Indian origin from Uganda, who came to Britain in the 1970s. She is familiar with the subtext of racism and discrimination in Britain and writes with flamboyant ferocity against it. Her second husband is white, and she recalled what transpired when he accompanied her to an Indian jewellery shop in London. There were dozens of Indians with bulging wallets crowding the shop, but the moment Mr Brown stepped in the owner of the shop waved the Indians aside and came bowing towards him, quite overwhelmed that a white Englishman had come to his shop.

Everywhere in the west, including Britain, there is proof that beyond a point assimilation—often just another word for homogenization—is not possible. Colour, faith and language—above all, origin—create

boundaries that can be minimized or camouflaged but not negotiated away.

Yasmin Alibhai Brown, however, rails against this truth. She resents the fact that 'twenty-eight years after arriving in this country, I am still frequently asked "where are you from?" For all the talk of multiculturalism, people who look like me are not ever expected to be of this country. The questioner cannot accept Ealing or London. Only elsewhere will do.'[5] Clearly, Yasmin is aware of the fact of difference—'where are you from?'—but is unwilling to accept that this difference is irrevocably linked to a fundamental part of her identity, to her colour, her background, her faith and her origins. She wants to be a part of the mainstream. But instead of accepting who she is, and then seeking to build realistic bridges across divides that are there to stay, she lashes out against the policy of multiculturalism, arguing that it is inward looking, 'erecting new barriers between groups in our own society' and taking people 'not to our shared future but much more to our past'. The next phase, she asserts, must be 'about collectively reimagining ourselves and the society in which we live'.[6]

Societies *can* reimagine themselves; instead of a simmering acrimony between competing ethnicities they can aspire to a harmonious heterogeneity. But imagination, however well intentioned, cannot do away with realities. If ethnic minorities do not wish to be constantly noticed for their difference it is because often that attention is racist or humiliating. Yasmin recalls one such incident in France: 'In 1995, we were in one of those dull French villages which never really light up, not even in the summer. To the villagers my children and I were Algerian, therefore scum. In a patisserie, my daughter, Leila, only a year old, touched a scarf worn by a middle-aged woman. Her hand was brusquely waved away and the woman swore in French at Arabs. I left the shop and burst into tears. I was that detested stranger again, just as I had been in 1972 when I had arrived in the UK from Uganda when white Britons used to abuse us and tell us to go back where we came from.' Memories of such incidents make minorities yearn to merge with the mainstream. Ziauddin Sardar, the well-known writer, broadcaster and cultural critic, speaks of the fear that this 'otherness' produces. 'It was my difference—noticeable in my colour, accent and general demeanour—that was the source of fear; a fear expressed so vividly in the famous "rivers of blood" speech by Enoch Powell.'[7] In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when public resentment against coloured migrants to the UK was at its peak, extreme right politicians like Enoch Powell had a responsive audience. In one of his vitriolic speeches against the minorities, made in 1968, he threatened that 'rivers of blood' would flow if coloured migration to the UK did not stop. A survey immediately after the speech showed that almost 75 per cent of those polled agreed with Powell's speech.

Sardar concedes that much has changed since the heyday of Enoch Powell, and that the policy of multiculturalism introduced in the 1980s has made cultural differences far more acceptable. But even today he has, like Yasmin, a problem when someone asks him where he is from. 'When people ask me where I am from, my standard reply is "Hackney". I wasn't actually born in Hackney but Hackney shaped my formative years and provides me with most of my childhood memories. It is home; and that's where I come from. This is difficult for most people to grasp. They look at me and exclaim: "Surely, you're Asian." It is hard to imagine a more ridiculous statement.'[8] The statement may be inaccurate because it bunches a host of ethnicities under the omnibus awning of 'Asian', but it is not all that ridiculous. For all his hankering after Hackney, Sardar admits himself that his colour and accent and demeanour *are* different. And Britain, he argues in his latest book *Balti Britain*, 'still fears difference. It is not possible to belong to a nation that sees itself in terms of a narrow and exclusive identity . . .'[9] But if one part of him is aware of that difference, another part wants him to be recognized only as British and not be 'celebrated' or racially derided for his 'otherness'. He accepts that he is racially different but he does not want 'colourful or ethnic labels appended to my person'. In white-Christian-majority Britain, he is willing to go so far as to say that 'there is one label that I identify with more than any other—that of being a Muslim';[10] and yet he wants to somehow transcend the 'racial dichotomies of Self and Other', to never be asked about his origins, what his faith is, and why his colour does not make him an organic resident of Hackney.

Like Yasmin, Sardar blames the policy of multiculturalism for his travails. He argues for a post-multicultural society where he can cease to exist as a noticeable 'other' and become an inconspicuous part of

white monochromatic Britain. He dreams of a United Kingdom of pluralistic identities, but wants to, ironically, erase his own identity because it is a permanent reason for the perennial question: Where are you from? Since multiculturalism puts permanent labels of difference on individuals and communities, he wants it scrapped. The policy, however flawed, becomes the punching bag for a malaise that has no remedy. And, since in his inner recesses he knows that no policy change can really create a milieu where people stop asking where you are from, he moves to the next step, which is to deny the centrality of his identity, splitting it into an infinite number of particles, so that none comes into focus and each is innocuous enough to escape attention. 'So I am a Muslim, a British citizen of Pakistani origins, a man, a writer, a critic, a broadcaster, an information scientist, a historian of science, a university professor, a scholar of Islam, a rationalist, a sceptic, a traditionalist and a partial vegetarian. All of these collective identities belong to me and each one is important in a particular context.'[11]

It is a sleight of hand that convinces no one, but has powerful supporters, the most important of them being the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. In his well-intentioned book *Identity and Violence* Sen is haunted by the fact that identity can kill. Perhaps his childhood memories of the Hindu–Muslim riots in Dhaka when, as a child of eleven he saw Kader Mian, an ordinary Muslim, stagger through the gate into his garden bleeding from a fatal knife wound, has moulded his passionate belief that religion must never become the sole recognizing aspect of any individual. His motivation is transparent: to minimize religious strife and to help build societies which value harmony and brotherhood and eliminate hate. But although the goal is unquestionably desirable, he marshals in its support a series of assumptions that require rigorous interrogation. Averse to the exclusionist defining role of religion, he swings to the other extreme by arguing that there is no centrality to identity at all, and all human beings are—or will potentially be—only an aggregation of affiliations and associations. 'In our normal lives, we see ourselves as members of a variety of groups—we belong to all of them,' he writes. 'A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category.'[12]

The problem with such a thesis is that it equates interests or pursuits or preoccupations, which are a contingent aspect of everyday life, with the primeval, enduring and unalterable attributes of identity that we are born with and cannot forsake. For instance, the role of religion in a person's life cannot be equated with his interest in sports; nor can an individual's colour have the same importance as her current 'taste in music'; nor can common social commitments erode linguistic loyalties. It is true that 'affiliations' or 'interests' can help to build bridges between different communities. But it is quite another thing to argue that because such bridges are possible or desirable there is no singularity to identity, and we can all become mirror images of each other. History is, indeed, witness to the violence and persecution perpetrated in the name of religion. And yet, the answer to that is not to devalue the role of religion but to find within it, and beyond it, ways to promote religious harmony. Mahatma Gandhi did not renounce religion in order to preach religious harmony. He remained a Hindu, and proudly so, but dipped into the teachings of other faiths to preach and practise his message of love and harmony. Sen cites the persecution of the Jews as an example of what an exclusive sense of identity can do. But the response to that persecution could never be that the Jews should have tried to be less Jewish and become a variety of other things. In fact, only by staunchly clinging on to who they were, and asserting their right to remain so, could they hope to persuade or prevail upon others to respect them. Undoubtedly, 'the assertion of human commonality'—a phrase Sen uses with high-minded abandon—could play a role in invoking that respect in others, but it could never be a substitute for the importance of Jews remaining Jews, fully convinced that their inalienable and overt Jewishness was a worthy cause unto itself, and did not need to be dissolved in a welter of other affiliations.

To be fair to Sen, he does concede that there are fundamental constraints in making choices where identity is concerned. It is not easy for anyone to disown one's religion, or bleach one's colour, or

eliminate accents from tongues, or blank out customs and beliefs that give meaning to our lives. Even if a person is willing to do so, it may not change the perception of others and the manner in which they continue to sense difference. But having accepted this, Sen trivializes his own pragmatism. The making of choices, he writes subsequently, 'is not a remarkable fact. It is just the way every choice in any field is actually faced. Indeed, nothing can be more elementary and universal than the fact that choices of all kinds in every area are always made within particular limits . . .'[13] Any person can exercise the choice to join a certain club, or patronize a particular restaurant, or apply for a specific job, or pursue an educational degree, or appreciate a popular film. These choices exist, Sen argues, like *commodities in a mall.* The only constraining factor is one's budget! The truth, however, is that fundamental attributes of identity are not like commodities in a mall; they cannot be freely exchanged or bought off the shelf; some are not even saleable, and even if they are, not every counter is open to everyone. Of course, there could be overzealous shoppers who have been at the mall for a very long time. Sen cites the case of Cornelia Sorabji:

> Cornelia Sorabji came to Britain from India in the 1880s, and her identities reflected the varieties of affiliations that she, like others, had. She was variously described by herself and others as an 'Indian' (she did eventually return to India and wrote an engaging book called *India Calling*), as being at home in England as well (homed in two countries, England and India), as a Parsee ('I am Parsee by nationality'), as a Christian (full of admiration for 'the early martyrs of the Christian Church'), as a sari-clad woman ('always perfectly dressed in a richly coloured sari', as the *Manchester Guardian* described her), as a lawyer and barrister-at-law (at Lincoln's Inn), as a fighter for women's education and for women's rights (she specialized as a legal adviser to veiled women, 'purdanaschins'), as a committed supporter of the British Raj (who even accused Mahatma Gandhi, not particularly fairly, of enrolling 'babies as early as six and seven years of age') always nostalgic about India ('the green parquets at Bodh Gaya; the blue wood smoke of an Indian village'), as a firm believer in the asymmetry between women and men (she was proud to be seen as a 'a modern woman'), as a teacher at an exclusively men's college ('at eighteen, in a Male College'), and as the first woman ever of any background to get the degree of bachelor of civil law at Oxford . . . Cornelia Sorabji's choices must have been influenced by her social origins and background, but she made her own decisions and made her own choices and chose her own priorities.[14]

Unfortunately for Sen's enthusiasm, and all of Cornelia Sorabji's not unremarkable efforts, she remained for the British little more than a likeable, even talented, Parsi Indian. Just like all the king's soldiers and all the king's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again, not all her academic degrees and activism and pronouncements and professions of allegiance could put together a different identity for her. She came to the UK as a Parsi Indian and left it as a Parsi Indian, although along the way she did her best to convince herself and others that she was something else.

Caricature is the consequence of not accepting who you are. There are many interests that one can acquire that provide a common meeting ground with other people, but it is a mistake to believe that these in themselves can change your essential identity. The internationally renowned psychoanalyst and writer Sudhir Kakar, and his wife Katharina Kakar, who was a Fellow at the Centre of the Study of World Religions at Harvard University, are categorical on this point, and I would like to quote them fully:

> Identity is not a role, or a succession of roles, with which it is often confused. It is not a garment that can be put on or taken off according to the weather outside; it is not 'fluid', but marked by a sense of continuity and sameness irrespective of where the person finds himself during the course of his life. A man's identity—of which the culture that he has grown up in is a vital part—is what makes him recognize himself and *be recognized* by the people who constitute his world. It is not something he has chosen, but something that has seized him. It can hurt, be cursed or bemoaned but cannot be discarded, though it can always be concealed from others or, more tragic, from one's own self.

> The cultural part of our personal identity, modern neuroscience tells us, is wired into our brains. The culture in which an infant grows up constitutes the software of the brain, much of which is already in place by the end of childhood. Not that the brain, a social and cultural organ as much as a biological one, does not keep changing with interactions with the environment in later life. Like the proverbial river one never steps into twice, one can never use the same brain twice. Even if our genetic endowment were to determine fifty per cent of our psyche and early childhood experiences another thirty per cent, there is still a remaining twenty per cent that changes through the rest of our lives. Yet, as the neurologist and philosopher Gerhard Roth observes, 'Irrespective of its genetic endowment, a human baby growing up in Africa, Europe or Japan will become an African, a European or a Japanese. And once someone has grown up in a particular culture and, let us say, is twenty years old, he will never acquire a full understanding of other cultures since the brain has passed through the narrow bottleneck of *culturalization*.' In other words, the possibilities of 'fluid' and changing identities in adulthood are rather limited and, moreover, rarely touch the deeper layers of the psyche. So, in a sense, we are Spanish or Korean—or Indian—much before we make the choice or identify this as an essential part of our identity.[15]

If identities are not 'fluid' and cannot be put on or taken off to suit the weather outside, co-option cannot be a limitless exercise. Societies must recognize the limits of assimilation; and while the society of 'competing diversities' that Sen values is a laudable goal, it can be built only if non-negotiable *differences* in identity are not mindlessly diluted. A commonality clustered around some cross-community affiliations and interests can cause irreparable harm to individuals and societies by glossing over differences in order to create the illusion of homogeneity. Diversity must not be trivialized and devalued in this manner. Real diversity allows divergences to exist and be recognized and respected. There are many intersections, especially in urban life, where people from different backgrounds have occasion to meet; equally, any person can develop hobbies and interests that are shared

by others and help widen his social circle. But while some minor aspects of identity can be influenced through such interactions, there are as many substantive ones that cannot. This applies both to the white Christian majority in Britain as it does to the ethnic minorities. In fact, one of the tyrannies of Sen's great antipathy to 'singular identities' is that no one can any more feel comfortable just being who he or she is. Like the replication of amoebas gone berserk, we must keep 'multiplying' our identities, until we all merge into a common sea of overlapping sameness.

A question can be asked, and indeed Sen does ask it: Are singular identities tenable any more in today's globalized world? The Kakars argue very emphatically that they are. They give the example of India, where under the awning of Indianness, there are hundreds of diversities jostling against each other. But these are not multiple identities adrift from their original anchor. They are multiple expressions of a common identity, though they may appear bewilderingly unrelated to the less informed outsider. Over twenty major languages with their own scripts and hundreds of dialects resound in a seemingly maddening Tower of Babel, but Sanskrit is the basis of almost all of them. Similarly, hundreds of festivals are celebrated all across the land, but the same mythologies or beliefs or harvest rituals animate them. Their names are different—for instance, Pongal in the south, Lori or Baisakhi in the north and Bihu in Assam—but they fall on the same date and are celebrated for the same reasons. A person standing with his legs crossed and his hands clasped to the left as though holding a flute, is Krishna to any Indian without the need for any fatiguing explanations. Manipuris in the remote north-east dance the raas of Krishna, as do the Bharatanatyam exponents in the deep south. The Hindustani music of north India appears to be very different from the Carnatic music of the south, but most ragas are common to both, with only the names different. Many more examples can be given to show that people who have evolved in the same civilizational crucible for thousands of years acquire a distinctive similarity. One must never be so mesmerized by the surface multiplicity as to ignore or dismiss the underlying unity. Without that unity India would be a random collation of diversities; with that unity it is a civilization. In fact, it was a colonial argument that India was not a civilizational unity and that it was the British who

forged her into a nation. Winston Churchill once famously said that to say that India is a nation is to say the equator is one.

Sudhir and Katharina Kakar have not the slightest doubt that Indians 'share a family resemblance in the sense that there is a distinctive Indian stamp on certain universal experiences'.[16] This family resemblance 'begins to stand out in sharp relief only when it is compared to the profiles of peoples of other civilizations or cultural clusters. A man who is an "Amritsari" in Punjab, for instance, is a Punjabi in the rest of India but an Indian in Europe; in the latter case, the "outer circle" of his identity—his Indian-ness—becomes central to his self-definition and his recognition by others.'[17] What is true about Indians is true for all well-defined ethnicities. Professor Kohl, an academic in Holland who has spent a lifetime studying India, told me once that the more he discovered India the more he realized how European he was. Why then do some people shy away from being recognized for who they are? Is it because they believe that such an assertion will invite rejection or reprisal? In that case, is the ploy of multiple identities the defence of a vulnerable minority? Is it the weapon of the aspiring; the ideological cover designed by those consigned to the margin? Those who are confident about their identity accept it as a badge of recognition, and are not afraid, like Sen, of 'unique categorization'. After all, the quintessential Englishman, or the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American, or the idiosyncratic white Frenchman, or the 'pure-bred' Prussian beer-loving German, harbour no debilitating doubts about their singular identity. For all their other interests and affiliations, they do not see that uniqueness dissolving in a host of theoretically infinite multiplicities. In fact, they see no contradiction between being themselves *and* having several outside associations which could be enriching and rewarding. Not everyone who is loyal to his religion or proud of being himself is a potential fundamentalist or terrorist. By presenting his arguments in such grossly oversimplified black-and-white terms, Sen does little to promote the goal of societal tolerance that is so dear to him.

In the context of multi-ethnic Britain, Sen worries that minorities that do not take refuge in multiple identities will be consigned to 'secluded boxes'. The fact of the matter is that people, whether they accept it or not, do belong to different boxes; but that does not necessarily mean that they are secluded within them. As he himself argues, people make enlightened choices about the priority they want to give to their inherited traditions, and in what measure they are willing to accept those of others. And yet, the freedom to build bridges beyond your essential identity must be accompanied by the freedom and the *courage* to be identified with it. It is true that rigid divisions can empower conservative spokespersons who dictate what ought to constitute your identity. But only those who are not in denial about who they are can effectively counter such an agenda. For instance, in India, if most Hindus, because they are educated and employed and members of clubs and watch films and appreciate music—all the affiliations and interactions that Sen gives so much importance to—were to say that their religion has little or no meaning for them and are ignorant about its tenets and eternal verities, they would seriously undermine their ability to counter the fundamentalists within Hinduism and could even strengthen their hold. And loyalty to your origins need not prevent an enlightened acceptance of the heritage and traditions of others. The message of tolerance and understanding comes best from those who are not ashamed or afraid of their origins.

Affiliations and interactions have an undeniable value in broadening the horizons of people; but they create multiple *interests*, not multiple identities. The error occurs when well-meaning theoreticians begin to substitute these interests for identities. Interests can be acquired; identities are what people are born with. Identities persist in spite of interests that influence them. This is true of Amartya Sen himself. I was once placed next to him at a sit-down dinner in his honour where the glitterati of Delhi was present in droves. Amartya had one of his arms in a sling (a pulled muscle, he said), but was otherwise in good form, enjoying his red wine and the adulation of the guests. He had read my critique in *The Independent* of his earlier book *The Argumentative Indian*, and I had the opportunity now to talk to him about my reservations on his views on identity. A person can, I told him, have more than one aspect to his personality, but to argue from that that any notion of a central or dominant identity is ephemeral is nothing short of relativist absurdity. I am originally from Varanasi, and have made Delhi my home, and speak and write English and have had to travel across the world, but none of this could ever diminish my

essential identity as an Indian. Amartya had himself lived abroad for most of his life; he was married to a foreigner, and had perhaps more reason than most people to begin to believe that he was a 'global citizen'. But to my surprise, I found that he was openly emotional about the fact that he had never given up his Indian passport, and was very proud of his childhood grounding in Sanskrit. He did not learn English properly, he confided in me, until he was in university. His first wife came from an Anglicized Bengali family. She knew all the English nursery rhymes that Indian children 'learn to parrot' when they enter school, but he was unfamiliar with them. The initial grounding in his mother tongue and in Sanskrit ensured that throughout his foreign sojourns his cultural compass was never disoriented. When I mentioned to him that Edward Said had written movingly about his existential dilemma, of not knowing where he belonged—to the Arab world where he was born or to America where he lived and taught for most of his life—Amartya's response was immediate. Said, he told me, never learnt Arabic, and *that* accounted for his doubts about where he came from.

Sen struck me as someone not in any doubt about his principal identity. His Indian passport was much more than just a document for him, and although he could have acquired another one for convenience, he did not do so for reasons he could not clearly rationalize ('I just could not bring myself to relinquish it'). And, given his grounding in Sanskrit and Bengali, he is today, even if this may embarrass him, a very good symbol of that fealty. The centrality of his own Indianness has never been in question for this eloquent critic of singular identities. In fact, I left with the distinct impression that he is the one person who should be greatly worried about the new malaise of cultural rootlessness that is afflicting large swathes of the world. Of all people, he would be the unhappiest if one consequence—already visible—of the ever-expanding universe of 'cosmopolitan' multiple interactions and affiliations is that people become everything to everyone but are ignorant about—or, worse—*indifferent* to their roots.

Because those roots matter and cannot—and should not—be hidden, Yasmin Alibhai Brown and Ziauddin Sardar must stop resenting the question 'Where are you from?' The first revolution is to accept who you are, and to respect the difference that goes with it. That difference

must be celebrated, because it will not go away, and the attempt to banish it only creates its own neurosis. In order to subscribe to similar values—and these are identifiable—people must be allowed to be different, otherwise the deliberate erosion of their difference will also erode their inclination to be similar. No one should be required to 'mongrelize' himself in order to acquire the 'pedigree' to be assimilated. Undeniably, the pressures to conform are always high, and co-option often occurs incipiently. George Szirtes, an immigrant from Hungary in the UK, writes: 'We grew less strange by the month. The days grew short as did our affections. Soon we were anybody.'[18] The danger is when we become 'anybody', then we conform but don't really belong, for we have devalued what was our own in order to expediently grasp what is somebody else's. The argument that being yourself will necessarily lead to xenophobia or chauvinism is an exaggerated threat invoked by those who resent your difference. On the contrary, a mature acknowledgement of your difference, in which you rejoice, can enable you to bring the best practices of your tradition to promote civilized interaction.

Of course, racism will remain. In fact, according to the British Ministry of Justice, the UK witnessed a 28 per cent increase in racially motivated crimes in the five years leading to 2008, most of them fuelled by the new Islamophobia unleashed after 9/11 and 7/7. People whose identities are clearly different create antibodies in societies, and the attempt to moderate this hostility and, if possible, eliminate it must be a continuing struggle. But the way to counter racism cannot be to deny your difference. That effort will always fail because your *separateness* is a very visible fact for the outsider to your culture. Even if you choose to you cannot become invisible. Dawn Butler, only the third black woman to have become a member of the House of Commons, recalls how former Tory minister David Amory once asked her: 'What are you doing here? This is for members only.' When she said that she was a member, he turned and said to his white colleague: 'They're letting anybody in nowadays.' There is also the more recent episode of Shilpa Shetty on Celebrity Big Brother. The Indian actress was constantly mimicked for her accent and called 'dog' and 'Paki' by Jade Goody, who went on to add for good measure: 'She makes me feel sick. She makes my skin crawl.' When Shilpa cooked chicken, the

model Danielle Lloyd refused it, saying, 'How do Indians eat with their fingers? One doesn't know where their fingers have been.' Keith Vaz, an MP of Indian origin, moved an 'early day motion' in the House of Commons against this kind of racist behaviour. Channel 4 was flooded too by protests, both by Asian and British viewers. But the fact that white participants in one of the most widely watched television programmes could be so blatantly racist speaks about a tendency that cannot be dismissed as just the bad breeding of a few B-grade celebrities.

Even so, the fact that difference in identities can cause friction does not necessarily mean that a dramatic clash of civilizations, as predicted by Samuel Huntington, is inevitable. Such a clash will occur only if people perceive these differences to be always adversarial or irreconcilable. That, however, should not be the case in any civilized interaction, because contrary to what some people believe, societies value, in their own long-term self-interest, the virtues of coexistence and harmony. Besides, Huntington represents one extreme, wherein a clash is the inescapable consequence of difference. The answer to him is not to argue the other extreme, that there is no difference at all. The sensible thing is to find the middle ground, which provides an authentic foundation for a meaningful and mutually enriching interaction.

There is an extraordinary sense of freedom, even elation, when people give up the attempt to be someone else. Multiculturalism is a brave and effective policy to allow people to enjoy that freedom. But it can become a tyranny if it fossilizes minorities in rigid stereotypes. The onus to prevent that does not lie only with the majority community. It is also the responsibility of those who are the beneficiaries of a multicultural policy. The acceptance and celebration of difference cannot reduce itself to the right of minorities to remain cloistered in their own ghettos. The choice to be who you are cannot become a reason to block a constructive engagement with the mainstream and other groups. If that happens, multiculturalism will, as Jonathan Sacks says, become a reason for segregation, allowing 'groups to live separately, with no incentive to integrate and every incentive not to'.[19] For this very reason, the freedom to be who one is cannot only be the preserve of the minorities. The white mainstream in Britain, for example, should be entitled to it too. Their identity is also the culmination of centuries of lived experience, of distinct nurturing lifestyles, value systems and institutions. These must be allowed to find expression without the burden of always being politically correct, or feeling guilty or being reticent. Multiculturalism must give freedom to all its stakeholders, otherwise it will create resentments and tensions that militate against its very purpose.

Since it has become fashionable now to trash multiculturalism and to look 'beyond', it is important to understand what the angst is all about. If the argument is that multiculturalism has encouraged segregation and has become an obstacle to integration, the logical question to ask is whether complete integration is desirable or even feasible. When groups are different, and that difference is—for valid reasons—enduring, there must be limits to integration. It cannot be an absolute end in itself in response to minorities wanting to somehow be like the mainstream, or the mainstream wanting to assimilate the minorities in a roughshod manner. Some degree of integration can happen naturally over time, and through the shared spaces of everyday life; but multiculturalism cannot be expected to—and should not—create a homogeneous society. Of course, there is always scope to fine-tune policies, and to remove from them excesses that reward or promote mechanical segregation. Sometimes, as Lord Bhikhu Parekh gently pointed out, policy planners do go too far to accommodate unreasonable requests from immigrants, and that too needs to be corrected. And yet, for all its inadequacies, very, very careful thought must be given to the consequences of jettisoning the policy itself. The truth is that with or without the policy of multiculturalism, people will continue to be asked: Where do you come from? And nothing really can be done about that.

Perhaps the time has come to accept that there is often an element of extra-territoriality in the affiliations of different ethnic groups. According to a survey done by BBC in 2007, over a third of people of South Asian ethnic origin said that they hardly feel British; as many as 75 per cent felt that their culture was being diluted by the fact that they live in Britain; half of them thought that they were not treated as British by white Britons despite decades of stay in the UK. Sudhir Kakar argues

that 'an underlying sense of Indian identity continues to persist even into the third or fourth generation of the Indian diasporas of the world—and not only when they gather for a Diwali celebration or to watch a Bollywood movie'.[20] Such a situation requires an enormous degree of tolerance in the majority community, and it is a tribute to the British government that more often than not such tolerance has been in evidence.

However, the fact of this duality—when citizens are nationals of one country but continue to be loyal to the country of their origin—also provides fodder to conservatives who consider such behaviour to be an act of disloyalty. The much-derided test devised by Lord Tebbit—which cricket team would an Indian or Pakistani British national cheer for if Britain was playing against the Indian or Pakistani team—is not entirely out of context, and we must be careful not to judge the British by yardsticks that we would not apply to ourselves. An element of utilitarianism—for lack of a better word—does influence the mentality of many immigrants, wherein they acquire a British citizenship for reasons of convenience or employment or business but preserve their emotional bonds with the country of their origin. Such primeval loyalties can be moderated in time; dual allegiances are possible wherein a 'looking back' to the country of origin is combined with an acceptance of the country of adoption, and an element of affection and pride infuses both. Kuku Oberoi, a very successful businessman who has lived happily in Thailand for forty years and has great respect for its people and culture, told me that he just could not bring himself to give up his Indian passport. He is heavily involved in public projects in Thailand and wants to give back to his country of adoption what it has given to him. 'But how can I stand at an immigration counter and say that I am Thai?' he asks me. 'I look like an Indian and nothing can change that.' Where the duality is benevolent and does not become tantamount to what some people consider 'betrayal', it can be accommodated. But when it crosses that point it needs to be recognized and not glossed over. Nation states cannot have citizens whose fealty is entirely utilitarian; tolerance for such behaviour will necessarily be low.

The issue of identity will continue to be pivotal in the years to come. The monolith state envisaged by the Treaty of Westphalia in Europe

no longer exists. There are, by some estimates, as many as sixteen million Muslims in Europe, living remnants of former empires. Immigration policies can become more conservative, but the growing numbers of the 'other' *already* within national boundaries is sufficient reason for policymakers to think deeply about how to deal with them. In fact, in spite of their reservations, former colonial powers will continue to allow immigration because of the need for cheap labour and emigration patterns. According to UN statistics, Britain will need to allow 83,000 workers every year just to keep the working population at a constant. The task of management will then be doubly difficult because, unlike in the early years after the demise of colonialism, minorities are no longer willing to behave like supplicants or be condescended to or co-opted. They have acquired new muscle, through wealth and professional success, and are more conscious of the issues of racism and discrimination. For instance, it is useful to think about how mainstream Britain reacts to the taking away of jobs by the coloured through outsourcing. Are the British prepared for the new swagger of the migrants? Can they sustain their tolerance and magnanimity when those for whom it is intended are doing better on average than them?

Immigrants too must introspect about who they wish to be in the countries of their adoption. The Indian and Chinese diaspora alone accounts for close to fifty million scattered globally. There are tensions relating to minorities in other parts of the world, such as Christians in Sudan, Egypt and other Muslim countries, Arabs in Israel, Indians in Malaysia, and, of course, the cocktail of ethnicities that constitute the former Yugoslavia. While the degree varies, the truth that emerges beyond a shadow of doubt is that the markers of identity and culture cannot be wished away. Bhikhu Parekh is spot on when he says: 'Culture gives coherence to our lives, gives us the resources to make sense of the world, stabilizes our personality, and so on. Its values and ideals inspire us, act as our moral compass, and guide us through life; its arts, rituals, songs, stories and literature fill us with joy and add colour and beauty to our lives; and its moral and spiritual wisdom comforts and helps us cope with the inevitable tragedies of our life.'[21] The challenge before immigrants is how to be themselves while negotiating the space that is their due in the countries of their adoption.

It is often a razor's edge that refuses to be blunted with time. Only recently, my friend Ravi Mirchandani, who has lived in Britain since the age of six and knows no other home, told me that his preference for Indian food, deeply rooted in the sounds, taste and smell of Indian cooking in his parents' home, just refuses to leave him. On an extended eight-week world tour that took him to many unlikely destinations in Latin America and Asia, the only thing he missed was Indian food, and wherever he was he desperately looked around for an Indian restaurant. The interesting thing is that Ravi has hardly any contact any more with his country of origin, almost no relatives that he knows in India, and very few memories of his early years in Mumbai. India exists for him more as a concept; it has receded from his daily life, and yet some part of it sleeps on within him, causing him to return to its call. I am reminded, in this context, of a beautiful poem by my friend the eminent poet and lyricist Gulzar:

For some days now
My neighbour's house has been silent
I no longer hear the radio
Nor clanging vessels
Hurled about in the courtyard at night

Abandoned, their dog
Wanders to my house to eat
But at night returns
To the doorstep of his home
To sleep[22]

It is the memories that linger that sustain the curious 'stickiness' of identity, the mystery of origins, and the nostalgia and anguish that go with it. V.S. Naipaul, who has spent a lifetime trying to disown or outgrow his small-island Indian-immigrant origins in Trinidad, is now willing to confess that his childhood memories of living in 'a transplanted peasant India . . . gave me a base of feeling and cultural knowledge which even members of my family who came later didn't have. This base of feeling has lasted all my life.'[23] Yasmin Alibhai Brown expresses the same thought: 'When you are wrenched from your homeland unexpectedly, you can never forget the sights, textures, the particular noises you left behind.'[24] And the writer Miroslav Janic puts it even more powerfully: 'No one who has lost his homeland can be calm again, anywhere, ever.'[25] It is perhaps for this reason that Indians who have lived for decades in America or in the UK, and done extremely well for themselves, still tell me that their one wish is to die in India.

On a recent visit to Kabul I visited Bagh-e-Babur, where, in accordance with his wishes, the Mughal emperor Babur was buried. The tomb is at the top of a terraced garden surrounded by the stark, treeless mountains that circle the city. The garden was completely destroyed during the civil war of the 1990s. Rival factions commanded different mountain perches overlooking the garden, and the resting place of the first great Mughal was caught in the crossfire; the trees and flowers and pavilions and water channels around his resting place were destroyed and the grounds heavily mined. With the defeat of the Taliban, the Karzai government began an ambitious—and successful—restoration attempt, with Ritish Nanda, a young Indian conservationist, leading the team. As I strolled along the now restored garden, I could not but think how bare and stark the environment still was, and must have always been: barren mountains covered with snow for more than half the year, no great river in the valley, the vegetation sparse, the entire vista devoid of colour. Agra, where Babur died, was, to my mind, infinitely more appealing: the expanse of the river Yamuna, lush green forests, adequate rainfall, a moderate winter, fertile soil sustaining large wheat and rice crops, and in spring the yellow burst of sarson. And yet, for Babur, Kabul was home. He had lived and ruled there for twenty-two years. He had made his name and realized his dreams in India, but this harsh mountain city was where he wished to return. This was where he knew he belonged. In that certainty, there could not be logical comparisons. It was a matter of emotion, of roots. His successors could become Indian, intermarrying locally and creating an amazingly syncretic culture with which they could identify. But for Babur, Kabul remained home. And so, even though he died in 'exile' in Agra, and was initially buried there, his wife and son, in accordance with his last wishes, brought his mortal remains to Kabul.

7

WITHIN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: ASYMMETRY AND CO-OPTION

Montek Singh Ahluwalia is a well-known man in India. A product of St Stephen's College and Oxford, his command of English is perfect. He enjoys the reputation of being a world-class economist and, as the executive head of India's apex planning body, holds the rank of a cabinet minister. In 2005, he came to London to deliver the 27th Nehru Memorial Lecture. The hall was packed with leading members of the Indian community, economists and representatives of the corporate world. There was pin-drop silence as Lord Romsey, the grandson of India's last viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, and the chairperson of the Nehru Memorial Trust, stood up to introduce the distinguished speaker. But there was a problem. Lord Romsey could not get the pronunciation of Ahluwalia right. Every time he tried his tongue tripped. Some members of the audience found it funny, as did, I got the distinct impression, Lord Romsey himself. Mr Ahluwalia, in his smart tie and suit, stood sheepishly on stage. Finally the Lord just gave up and by way of explanation said: 'I knew I wouldn't get it right.'

Why couldn't Lord Romsey get Mr Ahluwalia's name right? Should the question even be asked? After all, Indian names are notoriously difficult and complex. Perhaps Romsey Sahib could have practiced a little more. Ah-lu-wa-lia. If he had broken it up in that manner he may

have succeeded. But if he did not, it was no great matter. Montek Singh, he knew, would be most forgiving. He was 'one of us', really, speaking English with the right accent, part of the old blazer-and-college network. And there was no worry that *he* would ever pronounce Romsey wrong. Not only because—in this instance—Romsey was perhaps an easier name to pronounce, but also because it was expected that an Indian with the right education would *not* make such a mistake. He would call Warwick Warrick and not War-wick as its phonetic spelling would warrant. He would take pride in knowing that Yorkshire must be pronounced as Yorksher and never as York-shire, and that Edinburgh is actually Edin-borough. He would also accept as perfectly natural the fact that educated British people, who claim to know India, need not reciprocate. There is no need for them to be embarrassed when they routinely mispronounce the names of Indian cities, or festivals, or their Indian friends and colleagues. Or when they drop the tricky 'Mahatma' and still end up mispronouncing Gandhi as Gandi, and spelling it as Ghandi.

The empires of the past may have receded, but in the field of culture the new, emerging shoreline does not provide a level playing field. Not everybody has access to it. In our new, 'globalized' world, a few nations set the rules for the rest to follow, and the momentum of the past, combined with new strengths, still works against diversity and pluralism. This is not political rhetoric. The fact of a dominant cultural establishment is obvious and verifiable. An overwhelming majority of educated people in the world wear a suit and tie or other forms of western apparel, mothballing their traditional dress only for ceremonial or boutique occasions. Most people in the world hear about what is going on in the world through CNN or BBC because no alternative source of news comes close to their global reach. The majority in every country believe that the only civilized way to eat is with knife, fork and spoon. Almost everywhere, the urban young know more about the icons of Hollywood than about those of their own history and folklore. And of course most people in the world speak, or aspire to speak, English or French, giving their own languages second-class status or, worse, allowing them to languish. In India, for instance, knowledge of English has created a new caste system. Middle-class prosperity and the possibility of decent employment are linked to

knowledge of English, and it is immediately presumed that those who speak the language well are somehow more 'modern', cosmopolitan and progressive than those who don't.

It is true that absolutely level playing fields are a myth. A degree of inequality is inherent in the evolution of the human race. But people have to be aware of the *fact* of that inequality. Its manifestations have to be understood, and a balance sheet has to be drawn up to see what is lost and what is gained in its working. No global cultural audit has ever taken place, nor, perhaps, is it easy to have one. There are too many intangibles, too many emotions below the surface, and too much happening much too fast and in multiple and imperceptible ways, for people to always know when the line has been crossed between loss and gain, choice and imposition, appreciation and condescension, interaction and co-option.

Inequalities thrive in the field of culture because dominant cultures consider their domination normal, even morally good and uplifting, and have the means to project this message globally. Those at the receiving end are either passively co-opted or are ill equipped to provide a rejoinder. In this unequal transaction, the past and the present merge. The consequence of Empire provides the foundation for the erstwhile colonial powers to perpetuate, in a hundred subtle ways, the inequalities of the past in a present where their position has been strengthened exponentially by the new power of wealth and technology.

The manner in which this inequality operates requires very careful observation, because it can happen without either side noticing or acknowledging its existence. For instance, in an unequal cultural transaction, there is a 'deference' factor. If a representative of the dominant culture cracks a joke, you laugh a little more, to convey that you have understood; if *you* crack a joke and *he* laughs, you are overappreciative. If he mispronounces your name, or of your town, or of your cultural icons, you display understanding; if *you* mispronounce any of his, it is a sign of cultural backwardness, of not knowing what should be known. If he shows knowledge about your culture and history, it is an achievement, which you applaud; if *you* know about his culture and history, it is only what is expected of you. If you wear your native dress, it is a curiosity, which may be appreciated but is not

expected to be emulated, except for purposes of exotica; if you wear what *he* wears, it is a sign of your belonging to the global mainstream. You must be familiar with what he reads, the magazines, the newspapers, and the latest books that are part of his world; *he*, on the other hand, may not even remember what is the language that you speak, and is not expected to, either. And of course you are forgiving if he asks, as I have often been asked in London: 'Do you speak Hindu?'

Everything that is precious to you must belong to one of two poles: exotica or specialized study. Everything precious to him must be part of your normal education. He has the right to caricature you, even when no malice is intended. If you do the same to him, it borders on the indecorous. If he likes your cuisine you are grateful and you even—gratefully or graciously—accept his curiosity about your dietary habits and about the way you eat. But he would be very surprised if you did not know everything about his cuisine and eating habits.

Empires metamorphose; they do not die the moment direct rule ceases. In fact, the heady milieu of equality and freedom in the aftermath of colonial rule provides the ideal conditions for them to perpetuate themselves, quietly but surely and almost with the approval of those they ruled. There is no need for physical conquest. No intimidation is required. The colonial project just finds newer—and seemingly benevolent—forms. In the post-colonial bonhomie, best seen in international conclaves when leaders of formerly colonized countries rub shoulders with those who once ruled them, the subtext of inequality is easily camouflaged. It is the result of genuine political ingenuity on the part of the former Empire. A good example is the ceremonial iconography of the Commonwealth, an organization created by the British by co-opting their former colonies. At Commonwealth summits, prime ministers and presidents of the former Empire assemble dutifully and take their assigned places. The British sovereign, Her Majesty the Queen, who is the head of the organization, arrives to fanfare, last; the pre-assembled leaders, representing in some cases—like India—vastly bigger countries than the UK, rise to greet the royal eminence. When the opening plenary ends, they rise again, allowing their erstwhile sovereign to leave first. Only *then* are they free to find their way out. Perhaps if you ignore its foundational premise, the

Commonwealth could be described as a benevolent organization. It has probably done more good than harm, and helped nations move beyond the acrimonies of the past. Her Majesty the Queen is herself a loved figure and deserving of the respect that she is shown. But as I watched this ceremonial unfold at the one Commonwealth summit I attended in Edinburgh in 1997, I could not but wonder why my prime minister, who represented the will of a billion free people, acquiesced so effortlessly in an act of open deference in a conclave supposed to be of equals.

It is naïve to believe that globalization works to the equal benefit of all, or that it is free of hierarchies. The past and the present cannot be separated in watertight compartments. Those who once ruled the world cannot overnight reinvent themselves. Nor can the once colonized. Political freedom is only one element of emancipation. The assertion of political equality comes easily; economic discrepancies can be quantified and fought; but cultural inequity, even though pervasive, is often subtle and uncontested. Its manifestations can be substantive—and we shall discuss these—or seemingly trivial. For instance, most Indian newspapers in August 2008 carried a list of the ten 'Most Elegant Women Ever'. The selection was made by Lucie Smith, an 'elegance expert' and former headmistress of a British etiquette school. The ten who made it to her list were: Princess Diana, Sophia Loren, Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Catherine Zeta Jones, Ava Gardner, Jacqueline Onassis, Greta Garbo and Carla Bruni. Perhaps it was a coincidence that all the selectees were white; perhaps it was a further coincidence that all were from Europe and America, and nobody was found elegant enough from Asia or Africa or any other part of the world. But that is only one part of the story. Indian papers—and I am sure papers across Asia, Africa and elsewhere—reproduced this absurd selection without comment, not even a half-humorous query.

A year earlier, *GQ Magazine* had published a list of the ten most stylish men of the past fifty years. It comprised John F. Kennedy, Jack Nicholson, Sean Connery, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Al Pacino, Tom Brady (the quarterback of the New England Patriots, I discovered after some research), Michael Jordan, Muhammad Ali and Johnny Depp. The magazine's style editor, Adam Rapaport, explained at

length the criterion for the selection. 'This is the list [of men] that men would want to be,' he wrote. 'Style goes beyond clothes. It is about how you carry yourself—and there has to be some weight to the guy, some integrity, some gravitas. Everyone in this list had to have a genuine sense of personal style.' Quite obviously a great deal of thought had gone into making the selection. But again, no one qualified from anywhere outside the standard catchment area of the United States and Europe. The story, released by Reuters, was carried by almost every paper in India, again without comment. On a rare occasion, the odd Indian film star—after his or her talent has been vindicated by a supporting role in a Hollywood production—may be included in such a list. Inevitably, then, there is great self-congratulatory noise in our country. No one seems to be offended by the condescension.

Newspapers and magazines are run by people who wish to maximize circulation. They have a target audience and they cater to its interests. Any region of the world that is not a part of this focus does not matter, or matters only peripherally. But the interesting thing is that notwithstanding this limited canvas, western newspapers claim to speak for the world (in the case of the United States, they speak for the universe). They do so because they know that even though their knowledge of the humanity that is excluded from their narrow world view is negligible, the knowledge among the excluded about *their* world is substantial. This basic asymmetry is evident in a great many interactions. Mike Leigh, the well-known British film and television director, was to be in conversation at the Nehru Centre in London with film historian and teacher Clyde Jeavens on the occasion of the Satyajit Ray Memorial Lecture in November 2004. Jaishree Misra came running to me before the event to double check if I knew the correct pronunciation for both names. I knew Leigh was for some reason pronounced Lee, but Jeavens, she told me, was not Jeevans, but Jevans. While I took care of my pronunciation, I was surprised to note that Clyde, otherwise a perfect gentleman, could not pronounce Satyajit correctly. And the articulate Leigh confessed that he could never get the word Kanchenjunga, the title of one of Ray's best-known films, right. He pronounced it in the Spanish way. After the talk I asked Mike if he was familiar with some of the more talented Indian film directors since Ray. He said that he knew of them, but if I were to ask which

ones, he could not say because he could never remember their names. He wasn't in the least embarrassed as he made this confession.

Sunil Dutt and Ismail Merchant died on the same day, 25 May 2005. The death of Sunil Dutt, among the great icons of Indian cinema, was a huge story in the Indian media, and Ismail Merchant's passing away also deservedly made it to the front pages. In the British newspapers, however, there was not a word on Dutt, while there were lengthy obituaries on Merchant. Perhaps this is understandable, since Merchant had lived in the west and produced films—except the one he directed late in life— specifically for western audiences. However, if a British actor of the stature of Sunil Dutt had died, and if the British newspapers and television channels had been as full of the news, I can guarantee that the Indian press would have automatically carried the story on its front pages, without anyone stopping to think why this was necessary. *This* is what cultural asymmetry is about—asymmetry created by colonialism and sustained, now, by globalization.

These are random examples, and some would argue that such asymmetries do not matter. After all, Bollywood is doing increasingly well in the UK and the USA and Indian films and film actors have a growing following abroad. While this may be so, the question still needs to be asked: Why does so much ignorance and indifference persist in spite of this new recognition? More importantly, why don't those against whom this asymmetry operates resent it? Do we even notice that it exists? Or—and this is most likely—are we just grateful for the notice we have recently managed to get? The issue here is not of mechanical reciprocity. It is simply about not accepting marginalization in the world of our former colonizers while *they* occupy a disproportionate space in ours.

It is true that ignorance is not malice. There may be no intention to hurt or to humiliate. Insensitive and objectionable things may be said and done by people who are otherwise sympathetic to your world and would be shocked if they were accused of hostility or bias. But the fact that the perpetrators of an act are ignorant does not lessen the insult. And there is never any excuse, at the level of cultural interaction, for ignorance. In the spring of 2008 I hosted a dinner for Sir Martine Davidson, the CEO of the British Council, who was visiting Delhi. Several well-known artists, writers, educationists and musicians were

present. Among them was the legendary Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, whose wizardry on the sarod is renowned not only in India but internationally. Davidson met Amjad Bhai warmly. They exchanged pleasantries. Then, with well-meaning curiosity, Davidson asked: 'So what do you play?' There was stunned silence, and I hastened to divert the guest elsewhere. Davidson did not, I'm convinced, mean to be insulting. But the fact that the head of Britain's premier body for cultural relations—whose motto is to 'Learn, Share, Connect Worldwide'—did not know who Ustad Amjad Ali Khan was, in spite of being fully aware that he would be meeting with a select group of people of eminence in the field of culture (the guest list had been given in advance to the local British Council office), was appalling. What else but his culture's absolute conviction of its inherent superiority could have given him the confidence to walk in without having made the slightest effort to educate himself, and then to ask, without apology, the question that he asked?

I recall another instance of this nature, but in a totally different context. Renuka and I had gone to the influential Royal Geographic Society (RGS) in Kensington to hear our good friend William Dalrymple speak on his book—still in the writing—on the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, and the revolt of 1857 in Delhi. The hall was packed to capacity as Dalrymple entered the room. He was wearing a huge, unironed grey bandgala suit, with the buttons open, and a crumpled white shirt that spilled out of his trousers. William has changed greatly since I first met him in 1989. I was working then at the Foreign Office in Delhi, dealing with foreign correspondents, and he came to see me for accreditation as a journalist. He was very young then, the author of the bestselling book *In Xanadu*, which hardly anybody had read in India. He was working on his next book—this one on Delhi—*The City of Djinns*, and he and his charming wife Olivia had rented a barsati in Golf Links. He had no children then, was not balding, had not become rotund and, although a fairly well-known writer, wasn't anywhere as successful as he is today. As he walked up to the podium at the RGS that day in London, I noticed a huge backdrop announcing his name and the subject of his lecture. To my surprise and horror, Zafar was incorrectly spelt as Zafa. It was an egregious error, and boldly displayed for everyone to see—I'm sure

William saw it (though he didn't mention it then or later). But no one in the British audience seemed to notice. I talked to many people and they hadn't. In fact, one of them said to me: 'But that is how we pronounce it.' And that excused everything. For the British, an Indian name spelt wrongly was not something that brought into question their education or breeding or their cultural standing. But if an Indian giving a talk on an English monarch or governor general had misspelt his name—Elizabeth as Elzbeth or Hardinge as Harding—there would have been little tolerance in a British audience and—here lies the irony—no tolerance at all in an audience of the English-educated elite of India.

The example above is not meant as a comment on Dalrymple's scholarship. On the contrary, I am an admirer of his writings, in particular *The Last Mughal*, his book on Zafar and Delhi of 1857. But Dalrymple's success in India, and the manner in which he is fêted and dined by the Indian elite, is totally out of sync with what a successful writer from India would receive in Britain. Not even Vikram Seth would have so many of the rich and powerful in London vying for his attention. Successful but lesser known Indian authors writing in English would be more than grateful for a passing notice; and as for the talented many who do not write in English, the less said the better. Even profoundly powerful writers like Sunil Gangopadhyaya, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Mahasweta Devi, whose books have been translated into English and published by leading publishing houses, would hardly merit a square inch in the UK papers.

The status of English as a global language today is largely justified. But it is important to remember that this status is not only about the use of English and its convenience as a means of international communication. It is also about hegemony. Embedded in that hegemony is a deeply entrenched propensity for exclusion, which should concern people for whom English is not their first language. Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, the erudite chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO, once mentioned to me that his language, Yoruba, spoken by as many as 45 million people in West Africa, is hardly known in a world institutionally dominated by English and French and, to a lesser extent, Spanish. The tragedy is that there are very few avenues open to escape this marginalization in a globalized world. Sarah Kyankya, a young writer and publisher from Uganda, who had come to New Delhi to attend a literary seminar, spoke with genuine anguish about the near insurmountable constraints faced by her courageous but fledgling firm, Fountain Publishers, devoted to children's books. 'Our books are automatically considered to be of inferior quality in comparison with competing titles [from the west],' she said. 'Few international markets are interested in African folk tales, and none can compete with a global brand like Cinderella . . . Marketing for an international audience is very difficult; international markets are already flooded with high-quality but cheap publications from the west, and lack of funds makes it difficult to advertise in international journals or attend established book fairs. For lack of other alternatives, publishing in Africa is mostly focussed on textbooks, while the general books sector is heavily dominated by western multinationals.' So books from the UK and USA dominate shelf space, local literatures suffer and English rules.

One afternoon in London, a certain David Hillier-King MA, of 9, Talma Gardens, Twickenham, came in unannounced to see me. He was wearing a loud pink tie, a blazer, and maroon corduroy pants. He found it 'impossible' to pronounce my name, and when I asked him for his he said it was 'very easy': David King, as though my tongue was ordained to embrace his name effortlessly. Mr King, who had some old India connection, said that at one time he tried to learn Hindi. He rattled off a few random sentences in Hindi which I could not understand, and then snorted: 'And, you know, stuff like that.' Malcolm Muggeridge, he informed me, had said that 'the last Englishman lives in India and is brown.' This banal nugget of information pleased him greatly, and he convulsed with laughter. Noticing a portrait of Nehru, he exclaimed: 'He, of course, was the biggest brown Englishman of them all!'

Mr King was a bit of a caricature himself, and certainly his superficial and offensive behaviour was not representative of all Englishmen. However, his comment about the last brown Englishman in India had more than a kernel of truth. One of the most unfortunate and visible consequences of Empire, as we've seen before, is the sterile mimicry it bequeaths to its former subjects, and especially to its elite. That mimicry becomes a way of life; in time, it is accepted as the benchmark of social superiority; some are born as brown sahibs, and most of the

rest aspire to become brown sahibs. The absurdity, even shame, of this escapes notice, except by foreigners not familiar with the distortions created by colonialism, and now by globalization. The Delhi correspondent of the *Sunday Times* of the UK was once interviewing me on the lavish birthday parties thrown by the new rich for their children. He mentioned that in one such party in New Delhi, which he and his wife attended, the theme was Noddy, the character created by Enid Blyton. He found it incomprehensible that Indians, who have such a rich repertoire of folk and children's literature of their own, should celebrate a character that even in Britain is now considered to be somewhat politically incorrect for his attitude to coloured people. His wife narrated a similar experience. She was asked to judge a fancy dress competition at one of Delhi's elite schools, and there again were several children dressed up as Noddy.

The Noddy anecdote is but one example of how we Indians continue to remain in thrall to all things English. There are a million others all around us. The hair-cutting saloon to which I go in Vasant Vihar is called 'Oxford Cut'. Having failed to make the connection between the much-sought-after academic citadel in England and hairstyling skills in India, I asked the owner why he had chosen this name. His answer was honest: 'I attract many more of the elite with this name.' The walls of the saloon have big blow-ups of men with stylish haircuts. All of them are popular icons from the west. Only western pop music plays here. Sometimes, early in the morning, when the saloon has just opened, one can hear Indian music. The owner likes to begin the day with bhajans, but quickly changes over to the kind of music he thinks his patrons would like to hear.

More than sixty years after India gained independence, a half-page ad in a leading daily for a housing complex in Mohali, near Chandigarh, reads: 'MAYFAIR—Premium English Styled Apartments: Welcome to a lifestyle that's distinct, distinguished and definitely English in style.' This too would probably befuddle a foreigner. Why would Indians, with their very different climatic conditions and social traditions, buy homes that will be 'definitely English in style'? But they do, and make property developers rich, so that every Indian city and small town on the rise has apartment complexes that mimic western building designs and have names such as 'Regency Park', 'Westend Greens', 'Trinity Towers', 'Princeton Apartments', 'Silver Oaks', 'Parkwood Glade', 'Charmwood Estate'. The list is endless.

The dominance of cricket in Indian sports is another example. Cricket was introduced to India by the British. From the very beginning it had an elite status, patronized by the colonial rulers and their most flamboyant hangers-on, the maharajas and nawabs. 'In fact, there was,' writes A. Bimol Akoijam, a scholar from Africa, 'an uncanny similarity between the consolidation of colonial power and growth of cricket in South Asia.'[1] Today, India is marginalized in every other sport except cricket. Almost all the stars in the Indian sporting world are cricketers (and even when the class composition of the Indian cricket team has changed, with the best players coming from small towns and the middle or lower middle classes, they soon become Anglicized twenty-first-century sahibs). Players of other games languish for lack of money and infrastructure, but the top cricket players are enormously rich. The 'gentleman's game' left behind by the British has captured the Indian imagination like no other sport. We still stick to our precious colonial legacy, happy to get one or two medals, if at all, at the Olympics. But the irony is that the former rulers themselves have moved on. Football, not cricket, is the most popular sport in England today.

Cultural asymmetry thrives on the absence of interrogation. In that absence, reflexes from the past continue mindlessly. Why, for instance, should our leaders end their banquet speeches by raising a toast to the visiting dignitary? Indian government norms do not allow for the serving of alcohol on such occasions. A toast with a glass full of apple juice is, to say the least, unnecessary, especially since the practice is neither ours nor universal. (In fact, Wikipedia finds it so hard to understand this that it lists the Indian version of the toast as 'Aish Karo'—'Enjoy'!) Public rituals should reflect one's own culture and history. It would be perfectly in order if a formal banquet speech by an Indian leader ended with a prayer for the long life and prosperity of the guests.

Such issues may appear to be small, but the reasons why they continue to exist are substantive. The purpose here is not to mechanically reject what is western and always insist on what is indigenous. But rituals should not persist merely because they did so in the past when

the choice was not ours. One aspect of asymmetry is that those who colonized the world have had the luxury of preserving their own ceremonial rituals, while destroying or changing those of their subjects. For anyone conscious of this loss, there is a certain exhilaration in seeing a ceremony unfold as part of an authentic and uninterrupted tradition. I once had the opportunity in London to accompany our envoy when he went to present credentials to the Queen. We travelled in horse-drawn royal coaches from his residence at Kensington Palace Gardens to Buckingham Palace. The horses were a magnificent grey; the coach was covered in velvet, with the royal seal on both sides; the coachmen wore red overcoats and black-and-gold tophats; our escort, the chief of protocol, known as the Vice-Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps, was dressed in a nineteenth-century black costume with gold braid and an elaborate hat, and a sword in gold scabbard at his waist. On alighting at the porch, the 'porte cochere' at the centre of a large quadrangle, we were escorted up the steps of the Grand Entrance where the Equerry in Waiting received us and led us through the Grand Hall, past the Marble Hall, to the Bow Room, buttressed by the '1855' and '1844' chambers. Her Majesty the Queen awaited us in '1844'. Pages in traditional dress opened the door and then we were ushered into the royal presence, and we bowed as we had been instructed—'one bow on entering the Presence, walk forward to the Queen, make a second bow or courtesy and shake hands with Her Majesty', who, I noticed, was wearing white gloves. The Bow Room overlooked a beautiful lawn on which ducks waddled about; inside, the palace was replete with marble busts and portraits of royalty. On our return to our high commissioner's residence, the horses were fed, as per custom, apples and carrots, and the coachmen were given glasses of champagne.

For the colonized, in contrast, almost no public ceremony has an authentic and uninterrupted tradition. Nothing is as it originally was, or could have been without the colonial interregnum.

History, of course, cannot be reversed. But its consequences need to be appraised, more so in areas which have been left largely uninterrogated.

The process of appraisal and, even more importantly, of *reappropriation*, is especially important in the globalizing world of the twenty-first-century when the perils of homogenization are conveniently glossed over. All cultures have a specific context; they may be open to outside influences, but cannot be substituted with another, and if any such attempt is made, the results can be tragic. If either vision or vigilance is lacking, the process of globalization can co-opt, control and impoverish without the victim realizing this. Unlike the open conquests of past empires, the globalization of today is subtle, relentless, incipient, intrusive, imperceptible and all-pervasive. This is not to demonize every aspect of that process. Nor is it possible to reject the fact of a globalized world. However, there can be no denying that globalization is not a neutral phenomenon. It unfolds in an unequal world, where some countries have far greater influencing power than others. As Bhikhu Parekh writes: 'Globalization, of course, primarily originates in and is propelled by the West, and involves westernizing the rest of the world . . . the fact remains that western culture today enjoys enormous economic and political power, prestige and respectability. Its interactions with other cultures occur under grossly unequal conditions and those at the receiving end often find it difficult to make autonomous choices.'[2]

Autonomy is not about blindly rejecting outside influences. It is about making rational choices, so that we don't become willing accessories to our 'deculturization'. In Budapest, there is an octagonal square, not far from the Danube. Earlier it was famous for restaurants specializing in different facets of Hungarian cuisine; today, the traditional restaurants have closed shop; they have been replaced by McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut. No one quite knows how and when this complete transformation happened. Looking out from the window of a hotel in Beijing one can be forgiven for thinking it is Chicago. The skyline is overwhelmed by tall skyscrapers indistinguishable from any American city. The traditional Chinese hutongs have been razed to the ground, lost forever. In the pursuit of the new and the modern defined in western terms, Chinese authorities have unleashed a wave of urbanization that has done, according to a senior Chinese minister, 'as much damage to the country's traditional heritage as the Cultural Revolution'.[3] In the build-up to the 2008 Olympics, an army of western architects were brought in to create the

Beijing of the future: the Olympic site was planned by American architects; the 'bird's nest' stadium was the brainchild of a Swiss architect; the new international airport was designed by an Englishman; and the television headquarters was created by a Dutch.

Co-option is not about the absence of choice; it is about the invisible pressures that allow choice to be exercised only in a certain way. The Chinese authorities had the choice to refashion Beijing or Shanghai in a manner that created the new while preserving the old. But, co-opted into the western notion of progress, they were unable to make an autonomous choice about what to borrow and what to retain. The result is that one of the oldest and most sophisticated civilizations in the world could well end up having, as another high-level Chinese functionary lamented, 'a thousand cities with the same appearance'.[4] By contrast, London has preserved its historic central district, as have Paris and many other European cities.

Formerly colonized and economically poor nations are, of course, co-opted far more easily. But the need to be vigilant about the preservation of one's culture can worry the rich as well. In Tokyo, the president of the Japan Foundation, an official agency devoted to the promotion of Japanese culture, told me that many Japanese children now consider it 'backward' to eat food with chopsticks. This matter seemed to concern him greatly, because the use of chopsticks is such an intrinsic part of Japanese culture, and something intangible but exceptionally important would be lost if the next generation in Japan is inured to fast food western eateries at the cost of its own cuisine and eating habits. In Russia, a leading academic spoke to me about how the children of the new elite are losing their knowledge of Russian literature. Many of them are now sent to expensive boarding schools in Britain; they speak better English than their parents but have not read—and do not wish to read—Pushkin, Dostoevsky or Tolstoy.

Young, educated and city-dwelling Indians display a new confidence about themselves and the culture to which they belong. But confidence cannot be a substitute for knowledge, nor can bravado hide the fact that they are culturally adrift. In a random survey I carried out among the young in New Delhi, no one could give me a line-by-line meaning of the country's national anthem! Those whose knowledge about their own culture has been reduced to tokenism are co-opted that much

more easily, for they have lost the intellectual apparatus to make independent choices. In such situations, there is either thoughtless resentment or unthinking mimicry. The former leads to a chauvinistic rejection of anything from the west—as many goons show us every year on Valentine's Day in some Indian cities—and the latter, as Malavika Singh, publisher of the respected journal *Seminar*, puts it, results in 'a strange breed of imitative western culture that is rootless and anarchic in our social context, growing like a weed across this land'. She laments that 'success in contemporary India is symbolized by the traditional being abandoned and replaced by the worst, most pedestrian end of western culture. When Indians in the towns and cities of this land ape everything *phoren* because that makes them believe they have arrived, they do it carelessly, much like the manner in which they use and speak the language, English.' In this process, baithaks give way to rexined drawing rooms; ceramic or plastic replaces thalis; western-style attire is preferred to traditional wear; and indigenous designs are devalued for mass-produced western forms. It is true that some of these choices are dictated by functional and economic reasons; but it is also true that people believe that to change in this manner is a sign of progress and modernity. Sometimes, those who are westernized by heritage and choice—and are invariably the elite—deliberately reverse the trend by doing flamboyantly 'desi' things, as clear tokenism to prove their 'Indianness'. Those aspiring to be like them, still unsure about whether they have 'arrived' fully, then mindlessly copy these 'desi' affectations as well. The result is aesthetic kitsch, testimony to the cultural superficiality of both. The cultural pretensions of the affluent, especially, rarely fool the foreign observer. An American acquaintance of mine told me how a particularly well-heeled host, after spending the evening pontificating about the importance of indigenous traditions, spent all his energies at dinner trying to eat his roti-sabzi with a knife and fork!

I recall with amusement the reaction of some ambassadors in New Delhi when I told them that I eat Indian food with my hands. We were sitting at dinner at an Indian home; the host had, predictably, put a knife and fork next to each plate. I put them aside and announced that I would eat with my hands, which I had washed before coming to the table. This was the way Indian food should be eaten, I said, but I

would happily use a knife and fork if the food was western. The ambassadors nodded in agreement and promptly broke rotis and puris with their hands.

Interaction on the basis of equality can occur, but only if those who are denied it are aware of the process, and are willing to protest. The alchemy of globalization is such that western nations and societies manage to project an image of superior ethics and authority even while they dissemble and display double standards themselves. It is as if they can lay down the rules for 'civilized' and 'progressive' behaviour but need not follow these themselves. For instance, Salman Rushdie's gratuitous satire on the Prophet in *The Satanic Verses* was supported and hailed in the west as an example of freedom of expression. But the same yardstick is rarely, if ever, applied when Jesus is displayed in a derogatory manner. Here's Bhikhu Parekh, again:

> Until the 1960s a strict protocol governed his [Jesus'] depiction and it was considered disrespectful to display his face on the screen. *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), *Quo Vadis* (1951) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) show him from afar and feature only his hand and foot. In *King of Kings*, Jeffrey Hunter who played Jesus had to remove all bodily hair because it detracted from Jesus' divinity! *The Last Temptation of Christ* was irreverent but not at all abusive or mocking. As Scorcese himself said: 'I wanted to show a Christ you could agree with, a real earthy Jesus.' He went on, 'It was never my intention to shake anyone's faith, but rather to ignite faith.' Yet his film provoked a public outcry unprecedented in the history of religious films. Militant Christians launched a media campaign condemning Universal Pictures, the film's distributor, staged a mock flagellation of Christ outside the home of Lee Wasserman, chairman of the parent company of Universal Pictures, and so intimidated cinema owners that several movie chains refused to show the film. After initial resistance, Christians came to accept Jesus as a righteous rocker in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and an innocent clown in *Godspell*, but they took to the barricades when he was portrayed as a charlatan in *The Passover Plot*. The film was picketed out of existence after only a few weeks and never heard of again. It would seem that Muslims were only a few years behind Christians in these matters, and the latter were in no position to claim moral superiority or greater religious maturity over them.'[5]

Rushdie's depiction of the Prophet and his family was blasphemous. Why should the West expect the Islamic world to condone him on the grounds of freedom of expression when it is so touchy about any abusive depiction of Christ? More recently, in September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a dozen cartoons caricaturing Prophet Muhammad; one of the caricatures showed the revered Prophet wearing a bomb-shaped turban. When Muslims, who consider any portrayal of their Prophet as blasphemous, protested, the Danish newspaper defended its decision on the same grounds of freedom of expression, although it was reported that its editor had earlier turned down cartoons of Jesus as too offensive. In spite of the protests in the Islamic world, the caricatures were reproduced in Norway and several other European countries. The EU Justice and Security Commissioner, Franco Frattini, said that his organization may draw up a code that encourages the media to show 'prudence' when covering religion; the USA condemned the protests as being too violent and deliberately fanned by Syria and Iran. The rest of the world took home the image of a progressive world defending freedom of speech against a primitive rabble intolerant of any criticism.

The violent turn the protests took, including damage to some Dutch embassies, cannot be condoned. Nor, of course, can the sentence of death on Rushdie by the fatwa pronounced in Iran. But the general positing of an atavistic Islamic theocracy against the progressive secular values of western and Christian societies is open to serious interrogation. In Britain, for instance, the monarch is the 'protector of the faith'—not all faiths but *the* faith. There are elaborate rituals which conjoin the British sovereign with the Church. At the time of the coronation, the sovereign is first anointed in a religious ceremony. Sacred oil of a special formula is poured from the beak of an eagle-shaped ampulla into a spoon in which the Archbishop of Canterbury dips his finger.

Then, in the precincts of the Westminster Abbey, the head of the British Church hands over to the sovereign symbolic items denoting regalia: golden spurs for chivalry, a jewelled sword for justice and righteousness, bracelets for sincerity and wisdom, *the orb representing the spread of the Christian religion*, the ring of kingly dignity and Catholic faith, the sceptres of kingly power and justice, and the rod with the dove depicting equity and mercy. Finally, it is the Archbishop who crowns the sovereign.

The Church is thus an explicit part of the very symbol of British polity, the monarchy. This, of course, does not ipso facto make the UK a fundamentalist or theocratic state. Conversely, the strict absence of the Church in the rituals of the state may still not obliterate the predominant sensitivity to exclusively Christian concerns. The French president Nicolas Sarkozy actually took up with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, when the latter was on an official visit to France in October 2008, his anguish about the 'massacre of Christians in India'. Over forty Indians of the Christian faith had been killed when suspected Hindu extremists resorted to violence in the states of Orissa and Karnataka, ostensibly to protest against perceived missionary activism in converting Hindus to Christianity. The reprehensible killings were condemned by every political party, including the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party. Police reinforcements were sent to the disturbed areas; the Centre threatened to intervene directly; the chief ministers of both states, as well as national leaders, personally met with the heads of the Church to reassure them about their safety and that of their flock. Being an intelligent and reasonably well-informed head of state, Sarkozy would have known this. As an educated man interested in the world, he may also have known that India is a secular republic, and that despite some unfortunate, even horrific aberrations, Hindus are rarely hostile to other faiths. Hinduism is not a proselytizing religion, nor did it ever conduct crusades. In ancient times, Hindu kings patronized both their own temples *and* the Buddhist viharas. The Jews lived peaceably in India before they did anywhere else. Muslim traders from the Arab countries practised their faith undisturbed in Kerala more than a thousand years ago. The Parsis came in the seventh century and the Christians in the fourth, unsupported by armies. In recent times, there have been occasions of religious conflict, especially after the

divide-and-rule policy of the British and in the aftermath of the terrible holocaust of Partition. But as a study by two Harvard scholars[6] has brought out, communal violence is neither endemic nor chronic in India, and for every such violence there are many more examples of a living syncretism that is the most visible fabric of an essentially plural India. As against this, the wearing of turbans by Sikh children and headscarves by Muslim girls is banned in France because the state does not allow any visible symbol of religious affiliation. However, there is no ban on the wearing of the Christian cross.

And yet, President Sarkozy, the head of a country that prides itself on keeping religion out of matters of state, took up the question of the 'massacre of Christians', referring to violence, not entirely of a religious nature, that was swiftly brought to an end and condemned unequivocally by every Indian authority. Interestingly, neither Sarkozy nor any other western leader has expressed concern at the death of 600,000 Muslims in Iraq since the unjustified American invasion of that country in 2003. If an overwhelmingly Muslim country had invaded an overwhelmingly Christian country, and as a consequence of that as many as 600,000 Christians had died, the world would have talked of no other issue except this 'massacre'. But the tragedy of Iraq festers on, and discussions in the chancelleries of the west remain focussed on matters of strategy and winnability, and whether to withdraw western troops from Iraq sooner or later or never.

Religion plays an important role in the lives of all communities. After all, former president George Bush broke the strict US protocol in such matters to receive Pope Benedictine XVI at the airport. I recall watching in a hotel in Madrid on 24 April 2005 the live coverage on CNN of Pope Benedictine's consecration. Given the global reach of CNN, millions of people across the world watched for several hours every detail of the death of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, and the subsequent conclave and election and elaborate consecration ceremonies. Christiane Amanpour, the anchor, informed the world how the affection for the new Pope 'hits you like a tidal wave'. The camera panned repeatedly over the huge mass of people—mostly white, with the rare brown or black face, more earnest, more sincere than the others—and Amanpour emotionally described the sight as 'truly incredible'. The thought struck me that if people across the globe were

to watch for several hours—through an instrumentality as powerful as CNN—the live consecration of a Hindu pontiff or an Islamic mullah, what would be the reaction in the west? Would they worry that obscurantist religions were overtaking the secular world? Would they reinvoke the scientific and rational spirit of modern man as a counter to the blind ritualism and hysteria of such devotees? The essential fact is that technology is not neutral; and, in a globalizing world, those who have the means to disseminate their own cultural priorities have an unassailable advantage. Since such powerful communication technologies *appear* to be neutral, their messages are often internalized as universal, without scrutiny for bias or selectivity. The rest of the world is then expected to passively accept a particular point of view, to the exclusion of all others.

My sister is married to an Indian Christian, who is the dean of the prestigious St John's Medical College in Bangalore; he is a very loved and respected member of our family. My daughter is married to an American, and he too has been enthusiastically welcomed into the family. The issue here, therefore, is not about Christianity or America or the west per se, but about the need to be aware of the working of a globalized world. Rushdie has been lionized for his courage and independence, but it may be sobering for him to remember that his usefulness to his western patrons is not eternal. So long as his profound literary ire is directed at targets that are congruent to their interests, he will receive their mainstream acclaim and protection. As long as his writings—both fiction and other pontifications—reinforce the stereotyping of Muslims as fanatics and strengthen the popular mythology that Islam is a religion that only breeds fanaticism, he will be the subject of their adulation. But the very pedestal he has been placed on—for his courage in championing freedom of expression—may become very wobbly if his brave prose is used to criticize the west.

This is precisely what happened to Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Until he was a useful pawn in the west's campaign against the former Soviet Union, he had a multitude of admirers. The Nobel Prize and many more accolades were given to him. But the honeymoon began to wane after his usefulness diminished with the end of the Cold War. And when he began to be critical of certain aspects of western civilization, the admiration died. In a speech at Harvard in 1978 he accused the west of being blinded by its own sense of superiority. 'But the blindness of superiority continues,' he said in that speech, 'and upholds the belief that vast regions everywhere on our planet should develop and mature to the level of present-day western systems which in theory are the best and in practice the most attractive. There is this belief that all those other worlds are only being temporarily prevented by wicked governments or by heavy crises or by their own barbarity or incomprehension from taking the way of western pluralistic democracy, and from adopting the western way of life. Countries are judged on the merit of their progress in this direction. However, it is a conception which developed out of western incomprehension of the essence of other worlds, out of the mistake of measuring them all with a western yardstick. The real picture of our planet's development is quite different.' These were strong words indeed. The man whom the west had adopted had the nerve to question the assumptions of his benefactors. Not surprisingly, Solzhenitsyn began to fade away from the celebrity radar screens, and when he died in 2008, there was hardly a ripple. It is a lesson that Rushdie would do well to remember. But then, it is hardly likely that Rushdie will behave like Solzhenitsyn.

A dissenting voice, which seeks to question the dominant ideological bias, is often dealt with by an automatic simplification: if you are critical of Rushdie you are against freedom of speech; if you question the mess in Iraq you lack the resolve to fight terrorism; if you oppose the stereotyping of other societies you are against liberal democracy. Such a viewpoint is projected through a powerful media apparatus: newspapers, influential magazines, television chat shows, seminars and literary festivals. The consequence is that people of other cultures are denied the middle ground, the space to make informed choices in the context of their own historical experience and judgement. In India, for instance, large numbers of the anglicized elite internalized the western lionizing of Rushdie without any independent application of mind. In fact, the westernized upper fringe of India can be most often seen resplendent in 'secular' blazer and tie, spouting secular platitudes, almost as a reflex, the moment there is the slightest whiff of religion. For some of its members faith is tantamount to medievalism, and all religious practice the equivalent of ritual and superstition. The pity is

that while they are so up on the standard liberal argument, their knowledge of even such basics as the meaning and background of their own religious festivals is primitive, which makes them ineffectual clones of the 'British Fabian archetype', and aliens to their own cultural ethos. And then they wring their hands in surprise and dismay when the cultural space is occupied by people with extreme and chauvinistic ideologies.

Conformity with the west brings plaudits and certificates of approval, but does not break the barriers of essential difference and ensure equal status. Turkey's attempt at moulding a society and a people according to the western definition of 'modern civilization' is an instructive case. Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, Kemal Ataturk adopted almost wholesale the Swiss Civil Code: he gave equal rights to men and women, banned traditional headgear and dress, closed the mausoleums and dervesh lodges, adopted the international calendar, and abolished Muslim personal law. It was a mix of the desirable and the undesirable; the democratic and the undemocratic. Turkey became European. A new documentary released in 2008, where the director, Can Dundar, uses material from diaries and letters till recently locked away in military archives, reveals how determined Ataturk was 'to subordinate Islam and to force Turks to look and behave as westerners'. In 1914, the thirty-three-year-old Ataturk attended a ball in the Czech spa of Carlsbad with a Turkish diplomat and his wife, who remarked that she could not imagine such a scene—the dancing, the dress—in her home country. Dundar says: 'In a later entry in his diaries, Ataturk wrote that "it would not be difficult at all. If I [were] given the power, I would do it overnight."'[7] Ever since, Turkey has remained staunchly 'secular'; the army has stood like an all-pervasive censor against any harking to the past or display of religion; governments led by democratically elected leaders have faced possible dismissal because of some of their members wanting to wear the traditional headscarf. But in spite of having disowned its own religious heritage and traditions in one 'modernist' plunge, and doing everything possible to be like the west, Turkey is still knocking on the doors of the European Union for membership. A great many reasons are given by leaders of the EU why membership is difficult. But I suspect the real reason is that Turkey is a Muslim country, and the

overwhelmingly Christian EU is uncomfortable with that. That is what one president of an EU country told me candidly, and I believe he was—off the record—speaking a truth shared by his peers.

The loss of independent judgement that is the consequence of co-option entails a double jeopardy: first, it fosters a mimicry that is at odds with indigenous needs, contexts, culture and history; second, even then, it does not guarantee acceptance. A clone is seen as a clone, albeit a well-behaved one. Many of the values espoused by the west are worthy of emulation. But there cannot be a universal prescription for the content and pace of 'modernization'. When this important point is ignored, we have the case of countries like Iran, where even today there is a conservative backlash against the mindless pace of westernization unleashed by the last Shah of Iran, at the behest of the UK and America. The fact needs to be recognized that although we live in a world that technology and commerce have reduced to a village, we remain different people, and what makes us different needs to be acknowledged and, wherever possible, respected. The myth that this global village nurtures is that such differences have ceased to exist, or need not exist. Francis Fukuyama, the author of the bestselling *The End of History and the Last Man*, has argued that a homogeneous future has already arrived with the end of the Cold War and the triumph of western capitalism. But even he concedes in his later, and far more insightful work, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, that culture makes people and nations different and that no immutable laws can be applied uniformly to all people. Culture, he argues, is a compound of images, habits and social opinions that are a-rational, and 'incapable of being systemized into universal laws', and that the functioning of societies is conditioned by 'certain premodern cultural habits'.[8]

Samuel Huntington, in his equally widely discussed *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, has also argued that in the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among people are cultural, and not political, economic or ideological. Ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions are the attributes by which people define themselves. Attacking the 'universalist pretensions' of the west, he warns of an impending clash with other civilizations that could pose a grave threat to world peace.[9]

Huntington cannot be faulted for highlighting the differences in cultures. He can, as we have discussed earlier, be questioned for believing that these differences will inevitably lead to a clash. There is much within all cultures that can provide the foundation for a global edifice of harmony and dialogue. A clash can be averted, but *only* if each culture is able to find expression and is not throttled by the homogenizing pressures of globalization. The great myth that in a globalizing world we are all destined to become mirror images of each other has the unstated support of those cultures that have the greater wherewithal to mould people in their own image. Certainly, no culture can today claim to be insulated from outside influences. But it is precisely this greater intrusiveness that creates the *illusion* of homogeneity. In what appears to be an increasingly similar world, there is the continued miracle of diversity and difference, often impatient to be recognized and respected. Malcolm Imrie, my literary agent in London, once went late at night to pick up food from a restaurant owned by a Turkish man. He bought pitta bread, hummus, and some feta cheese and, by way of conversation, told the proprietor that he was looking forward now to a Turkish dinner at home. To which the Turkish gentleman, pointing at what Malcolm had bought, said: 'That, sir, is from Turkey, that from Greece, and that is from Cyprus.' We live in a world that is permanently in danger of being oversimplified to suit someone else's lack of knowledge or insensitivity to the particularities of an inherently diverse world. In this case the Turk spoke up, but most often people whose cultures are being railroaded into one indiscriminate rubric don't even make the effort to protest.

On a recent visit to Jordan for a seminar, I listened attentively to an Egyptian speak about the tradition of dance. He spoke about the difference in body movements between east and west, and how societies differ in their acceptance of body movements. In the government-run handicrafts shop outside the conference venue, a sign proclaimed that the aim of the Jordanian government was to preserve 'Jordanian culture'. However, as an instant reminder that this laudable goal is easier stated than achieved, was a private gift shop right next door that called itself 'Indiana Jones'. Even small shops were labelled 'supermarket' in the American style. The owner of one such shop had recently returned from the USA, and had a noticeable American accent. He spoke to me about how he had nurtured his dream to open a supermarket in Amman just like the ones he used to frequent in Chicago. For all visible purposes he seemed to have succeeded admirably, but in the toilet at the back of the shop the steel jugs with their curved handles next to each toilet seat, so typical of the Muslim world, made clear that his Americanization had its limitations.

'When will you Indians learn to be like the rest of the world?' This was a question thrown at the well-known Indian fashion designer Ritu Kumar by one of her western clients. Many of Ritu's creations, in deference to the tradition of the sari or the ghagra-choli, had provisions for an exposed midriff. This exasperated her client for it was a deviation from the standard western suit or dress. In the circumstances, the question was not about Ritu's ability to change, but about when *all* Indians would.

The pressures to homogenize should never be underestimated, and a viable choice can only be made if one is aware of what these pressures are, what motivates them, what is lost if one succumbs, and what can be gained if one adapts. The single greatest worry today is that in an aggressively globalizing world people may not be able to make such informed choices. Sahana Pradhan, the former foreign minister of Nepal, whom I met in 2007, spoke to me about the rich and varied folk traditions of her country. In one particular part of the country, she said, children not yet ten could sing a folk song for almost every occasion in a Nepali's life, but in most other parts of Nepal, things were changing at an alarming pace. The seventy-four-year-old minister was no obscurantist wallowing in futile nostalgia. She was a member of the country's Communist Party, had a master's degree in economics, and had been a teacher in a university for most of her life. Yet, talking about the fast eroding folk traditions of her country she became very emotional. I could sense the sadness and helplessness as she spoke. 'Now the first thing children learn in Nepal is Baa Baa Black Sheep,' she ended abruptly, and fell silent.

If children in Nepal, or in India, or in Africa, or in Central Asia, or anywhere else in the world, learn English nursery rhymes it may be

good for them, but if they do so at the cost of their own cultural roots, then it is not an equal or desirable transaction. The difference between loss and gain is blurred for those at the receiving end of the supposed imperatives of our new market-driven age. No serious balance sheet is ever drawn up in the rush to become more accepted, more successful, more a part of a commercially integrated world—whose seductions are insistently and endlessly advertised. For those on the edge of poverty, as so many people in the world still are, this lack of awareness and discrimination and vigilance is perhaps excusable, but the educated and relatively well off have no excuse. To be like *them*, to be accepted by *them*, to win accolades from *them*, is a pervasive motivation for those on the other side of the cultural divide. The merits are rarely debated; the loss is rarely noticed; and the gains are glorified.

When Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize in October 2008 for his novel *The White Tiger*, there was euphoria in the Indian media. The normally balanced and staid *Hindu* made it the lead headline on the front page. All the papers had pictures of Adiga receiving the award in a tuxedo complete with bow tie. (If an Englishman is given one of our awards, would we insist that he wear a shervani or a bandgala?) Some papers carried editorials on the 'great' victory. The President and the prime minister sent congratulatory messages—which has never happened, in living memory, when a writer has won the Sahitya Akademi Award or the Jnanpith Award. There was very little said on the intrinsic quality of the novel. It mattered to nobody that Adiga's depiction of his country as 'a place of brutal injustice and sordid corruption'—as the *Guardian* summarized it—could perhaps be extreme or one-sided or too glib. The point is not about Adiga being critical. Criticism is something India can take in its stride, and needs to take into account. But most Indians merely exulted at the fact that the book had won an international award, with almost no attempt at independent evaluation. The irony of it all is that the merits of the book, and the reasons for its selection, were widely discussed in the UK. While many papers wrote in its praise, the *Guardian* thought that it was 'fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one'; the *Daily Telegraph* dismissed it as the 'first draft of a Bollywood screenplay' where 'every character is a cliché'. In India, 99 per cent of the mainstream media only repeated what the British jury for the award had said of the book. Only Manjula Padmanabhan, in the *Outlook*, gave the book a damningly negative review, but that was before the Booker.

Something similar happened with *Slumdog Millionaire*. When the film won the BAFTA award in Britain for best picture, it had not even been officially released in India. Even though most Indians had not seen the film, and could not, therefore, judge it on merit, the media was near euphoric at this achievement. After the film won the Oscar in February 2009, all sense of proportion was lost. We went hysterical. Banner headlines announced the 'victory'; editorials waxed eloquent about how India had finally made it to the 'big league'; for days television channels carried only this as the lead story; panel discussions debated the recognition of Indian talent globally. Very few paused to debate the merits of the film or, even more importantly, recall that this was not an Indian film at all. The producer of the film was British, and it had been entered for the awards as a British film. In fact, Lord Meghnad Desai put it bluntly in a public forum that the film could win the Oscar only because it was made by a British film director (just as *The White Tiger* could qualify for and win the Booker because it had been published by a British publisher).

True, some Indians, who were part of the film's team, won Oscars: A.R. Rahman for the music; Gulzar for the lyrics; and Resul Pookutty for the editing. However, most people would agree that although Rahman is, indeed, a brilliant musician, his score for *Slumdog Millionaire* is far from his best. Similarly, Gulzar's genius as a poet is hardly reflected in '*Jai Ho*', the song that won him the Oscar. The film itself was entertaining, but not extraordinary. In parts its storyline was naïve, and in many places the depiction of India and its realities was clearly influenced by western stereotypes. Yet, such was the euphoria generated by the Oscar, that criticizing the film meant being unpatriotic. Even worse, many commentators equated any attempt at an objective critique of the film with an outdated oversensitivity to the depiction of India's poverty. (This was also the frequent response to criticism of *The White Tiger*. The parallels are revealing. As perhaps is the fact that the film and novel, similar in theme and treatment, received western awards and acclaim within a few months of each other. The last time this happened was when Sushmita Sen was chosen Miss Universe and Aishwarya Rai Miss World in the same year, 1994, a time when India

was opening up its markets to the west. Perhaps the honeymoon is now over and in 2008–09 a different message needed to be sent to an economically resurgent India that is challenging the dominance of western nations.)

Bluntly put, the fact of foreign recognition, be it the Oscar or the Booker, is enough to transport Indians into a self-congratulatory trance that suspends the ability for any independent application of mind on the merits of such a recognition. In the case of Adiga, the *foreign* endorsement of *our* storytelling skills—in English—was far more important than any serious debate on the novel's literary quality or the substance of the author's thesis. Winning the Booker was like being recognized where it mattered, of being vindicated in the right quarters, of having glamorously arrived. But what about the departure lounge left behind? A leading Indian publisher pointed out in an interview that if an author gets the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in India, it makes a difference in sales of perhaps ten copies! In the case of the Crossword Prize—India's modest answer to the Booker—there may be an additional sale of 1000 copies. But with the Booker sales go up exponentially—anything from 50,000 to 150,000 copies. Booker-winning novels with any India connection leap out of shelves, bought by customers eager to read what the English have recognized. Interestingly, *Slumdog Millionaire* did not do well commercially in India. No matter. The fact that a film shot in India, with an Indian theme, was liked and awarded in the west was enough reason to celebrate.

Foreign endorsements are very important to us Indians. When the question of giving titles to loyal Indians was being discussed in the British Parliament in 1876, Disraeli argued that Indians attach enormous value to such distinctions. Stafford Northcote, an MP who also participated in the debate, said that 'what to us may appear exceedingly trumpery and trivial distinctions, are in their eyes of the greatest importance'.[10] The Booker and the Oscar do, of course, carry considerable prestige, but that prestige is magnified a hundredfold in India. Without a doubt, if an Englishman who wrote a simplistic book not only savagely critical of British society but also one that got several basic facts wrong was to receive India's most prominent literary prize, the reaction in the UK would be circumspect, to say the least. Similarly, if a film made by a British director about the French, for instance, was to get the Oscar, the French would not celebrate the award without discussing at very great length the merits of the film. A nation with a cultural heritage as substantial as ours must have the self-respect, dignity and objectivity to display a sense of balance towards foreign recognition. We cannot be swept away by it.

Ultimately, Indians need to work to give their own awards the kind of prestige the Booker or the Oscars enjoy. This will, of course, take time, but in the interim we should be far more intelligent about the value of the recognitions they bestow, and the politics behind them. After all, how important or objective or desirable can the Nobel Prize for Peace be if Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest messiah of non-violence the world has seen for centuries, never got it? His name was nominated several times but Sweden did not want to annoy Britain. After 1947, Nehru was nominated as many as eleven times, but he too never got it, while Henry Kissinger, adviser to Richard Nixon who used napalm bombs in Vietnam, did. Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel for literature made every Indian proud, and his stock among his compatriots went up greatly after this recognition; but there is obviously something amiss if since then French writers have received the same prize fourteen times, American writers ten times, British writers nine times, and no Indian has. Except Naipaul—Indian by descent, British by choice—who made a career of being critical about India, and after 9/11 endeared himself to the west by being even more critical about the Islamic world.

One unmistakable symptom of co-option is the exaggerated importance given to the slightest criticism or approval emanating from the West. The first produces howls of protest, the second unwarranted jubilation. Countries which are confident about themselves need to develop a greater sense of equilibrium, but they can only do this if they first reappropriate, in authentic terms, their own cultural space. Mike Leigh, whom I have referred to before, said something quite remarkable that evening at the Nehru Centre. Clyde Jeavans was saying that Mike's films dealt overwhelmingly with quintessentially British subjects, and the way of life of ordinary British people, and Mike simply said in response: 'The greatest sin you can commit is not to be a part of the territory to which you belong.' When one is confidently a part of that territory, it shows. I recently spent a wonderful, intellectually enriching afternoon with the well-known art aficionado

and historian Rajiv Sethi. We met first at his office at the Planning Commission, and then at the Asian Heritage Foundation which he runs in New Delhi. I have known Rajiv well for some years, and have followed his career with interest. He comes from a very Anglicized background, but his lifelong mission has been to rediscover and help preserve the indigenous artistic traditions of India. To this end he has travelled extensively in the Indian countryside, trying to prop up artisans who are on the verge of giving up on generations of artistic excellence, whether in painting or sculpture or metal work or pottery or weaving. What I find interesting is that the nature of his calling has changed Rajiv: I have never seen him dressed in anything other than a chooridar and kurta; and he spoke to me that afternoon, as on most other occasions, in fluent Hindi. The very process of rediscovering his natural heritage has led him to acquire visible Indian attributes *without* reducing his ability to be a global citizen. Had he chosen a different vocation he would have remained, I have not the slightest doubt, what he was initially ordained to be by the nature of his background: an affable 'brown sahib', Indian by citizenship but in most other ways co-opted into the global village.

No culture or nation or society can today insulate itself from external influences, nor should it try. But that is precisely the reason why it is essential to judiciously evaluate the onslaught. Homogenization, most notably in the cultural field, is the sub-text of globalization. If we cannot judge what to borrow and how much, we become mimics and condemn ourselves to confusion and caricature. Globalization encourages those susceptible to its seductions to either become what they cannot authentically be, or reconfigure themselves as stereotypes that are 'amusing' to the co-opting forces—which are the dominant cultures of the west. A recent trend, for example, is for Indians to project their difference by being 'cute'. It is summed up in that curious phrase: 'We are like that only.' Of course we are like that only—by which, I suppose, we mean that we are unique—but this is because we have been shaped by a distinctive and ancient culture, and not because of trivialities such as the way we speak English, or break queues, or travel boisterously, or honk on the road, or accept 'baksheesh', or have loud and lavish weddings—all things that people outside, especially in the west, define us by.

During the colonial period, the natives would consciously behave in a manner that confirmed the stereotypical views that their rulers had of them. For instance, one pervasive myth perpetuated by the colonial rulers was that their subjects were like children needing to be guided. It is a matter of historical record—and the journals and letters of many British officials bring this out clearly—that servants and subordinates would behave like cretins in order to conform to that image. The circumstances have changed greatly since, but the pressure to 'perform' is something we still need to fight. Strong, independent cultures anywhere will throw up 'peculiarities' of everyday behaviour. But it would be an insult to the deeper impulses of that culture to magnify those peculiarities and make a virtue of them in order to win the approbation of the outsider.

The courage to be oneself, with dignity and self-awareness, and without lapsing into chauvinism, xenophobia or blind traditionalism, is the particular challenge of our world today. The dominant voices in a globalizing world encourage the belief that cultures need not command the loyalties of the past, and that it is perfectly possible for individuals to cherry-pick their way through the many different cultures of an equal and eclectic—indeed, perfect—world. This romanticized notion of a nomadic lifestyle has its appeal, especially for the small minority that is genuinely born in the interstices of several cultures and fetishizes airport lounges as the democratic, metropolitan villages of the new world. (They shut their eyes when they visit the toilets, of course, or when a 'profiled' Asian or Muslim is asked to 'step aside' at security.) But for most of mankind this runs, as Bhikhu Parekh argues, 'the risk of becoming shallow and fragile. Lacking historical depth and traditions, it cannot inspire and guide choices, fails to provide a moral compass and stability, and encourages the habit of hopping from culture to culture to avoid the rigour and discipline of any one of them. It is a culture of quotations, a babble of discordant voices, and not a culture in any meaningful sense of the term.'[11] Parekh also rightly demolishes the myth that 'all boundaries are reactionary and crippling and their transgressions a symbol of creativity and freedom. Boundaries structure

our lives, give us a sense of rootedness and identity, and provide a point of reference. Even when we rebel against them, we know what we are rebelling against and why.'[12]

There is no contradiction between being culturally rooted and being a global citizen. On the contrary, only those who are so rooted win genuine respect. Photocopies are not respected, they are merely a convenience. An Indian intellectual who is as proficient in his mother tongue as he is in English will be valued for having a voice of his own. An Indian woman who wears a sari is a brand ambassador of a refined culture even if she can also carry off a western dress. If India's urban young knew of Krishna's sringara rasa, reflected so passionately in his love for Radha, they might look less absurd mimicking the rituals of Valentine's Day and perhaps also defend more confidently their right to celebrate it. If the talented students of the Shakespeare Society of St Stephen's College studied the theory of aesthetics and theatre propounded in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, their productions would appear more authentic and less derivative. If the humanities departments of our universities were less neglected and more capable of original thinking—which was once the hallmark of Indian culture—they would contribute to a better image of India, giving strength and context to the achievements of our engineers and doctors in the west. If, as Justice Markandey Katju of the Supreme Court recently pointed out, our lawyers were familiar with the Mimansa principles of judicial interpretation in addition to the work of western jurists like Maxwell and Craies, they would probably enhance their own worth in the eyes of their global compatriots.[13]

In a world of cultural asymmetry, and one where the pressures of co-option are immense, individual cultures have to make extra efforts to preserve *and* project their distinct heritage and way of life. For the once colonized, the task is doubly difficult. The project of colonization, after all, was about undermining the culture of the natives and eroding their confidence in it. Colonialism robbed its victims of the pride and security that comes from being rooted, and this was done through a disruption of creative continuity of a magnitude that has no parallel in human history: almost all means of propagating local cultures were destroyed. As a consequence of that process, there is a continuing predisposition among the formerly colonized to absorb the culture of

the erstwhile ruling power. In this sense, the co-option inherent in the globalizing world of today is a continuation of the colonial projects of the past. The past and the present are closely linked, and those who seek to structure the future on their own terms must first understand this co-relation between colonialism and globalization.

Mahatma Gandhi understood that the fight against colonialism is incomplete without the assertion of one's culture and identity. That is why he consciously chose to be visibly Indian while opposing the British. He could have worn a suit and tie, but he chose the dhoti; he could have lived in a colonial-style bungalow, but he chose to build an ashram in the Indian way. Even today, a visit to the ashram at Sabarmati is an aesthetic celebration. One man's sensitivity to his own heritage allowed him to structure space in a manner that was authentic, simple and beautiful. He wrote his first book—*Hind Swaraj*—in Gujarati, although he could have done so in English. He admired and respected the Bible, but was well versed in the scriptures and philosophy of his own faith and the other religions of his country. He understood the utility of English—and indeed wrote and spoke it impeccably—but was never in doubt about the centrality of India's indigenous languages.

The point is not that we need to believe in or do everything he did. Along with his great truths, Gandhi had his minor fads and they are subject to scrutiny. But the Mahatma had the courage to be himself, and he could be so without affectation or hate. Charles Smith, who was Mountbatten's valet and butler in India, recalls what happened when Gandhi came one afternoon for tea at the Viceroy's Palace. The tables in the garden were laden with scones and sandwiches, but he smiled benignly at his hosts and chose 'to eat a bowl of curds he had brought with him. He even persuaded Lord Louis to sample a mouthful! His Lordship bravely swallowed it, but gracefully declined the offer of more.'[14] On another occasion, Gandhi responded to the urgent summons of Mountbatten in his own inimitable way. 'Judge of my astonished delight,' Mountbatten recorded, 'on my finding him enter my study with his finger to his lips to indicate that it was his day of silence. So I did all the talking. He scribbled a few friendly notes on the backs of used envelopes.'[15] There was also that occasion—once again at the Viceroy's Palace—when during a lunch break, Gandhi spread out a chattai on the ground and sat down to eat. A horrified British official

kept this note: 'I remember Gandhi squatting on the floor and after a while a girl coming in with some filthy yellow stuff which he started eating without as much as a by your leave.'[16]

Such idiosyncrasies, if that is how some would wish to see them, were not only about the superiority of goat's curd over scones, or the virtues of silence, or the merits of sitting on the floor while eating. They were symbolic of a revolution of spirit, a proclamation of intent, that even under British subjugation he would meet with the rulers as *himself*. His persona was, therefore, at once rid of both deference and mimicry. The question is whether he can inspire us even today—for the issue is as important now as it was then—to be Indian through a conscious decision not to be imitative or unthinkingly derivative. If he can, then we would be equipped to authentically preserve our self-respect and dignity while simultaneously enhancing our stock as global citizens.

In an increasingly Anglo-globalized world, one of the key challenges will be what happens to other cultures. The dominant powers cannot be expected to curb their global cultural reach. It is a momentum which builds upon the empires of the past and, given the obtrusiveness and reach of technology and wealth, can no longer be controlled. Institutions like UNESCO are doing what they can to preserve cultural diversity by, inter alia, supporting the preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage, and in 2001 the organization adopted the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity. But while this is laudable activity, the effort has to go beyond the passing of resolutions and the selective allocation of funds towards preserving heritage. Diversity cannot only be preserved in museums. It needs to be respected as a living entity. Moreover, unless diversity is accompanied by *equality* between cultures, there is the real danger of some cultures reinforcing their global hold and others being fossilized for the viewing pleasure of tourists. International organizations can only do so much for people. The real awareness of what is afoot, and what needs to be preserved and projected, has to ignite in the minds of peoples whose cultures are under threat. International bodies, for all their good intentions, can be manipulated or used as camouflage by the dominant nations of the world that will, in theory, make every assurance of support. For instance, President Sarkozy of France said this while speaking at the

UN General Assembly in September 2007: 'Attachment to one's faith, to one's language and culture, and to one's way of life, thought and belief—all this is natural, legitimate and profoundly human . . . To deny this is to sow the seeds of humiliation. A "clash of civilizations" will not be averted by forcing everyone to think and believe alike; cultural and religious diversity must be accepted everywhere and by all.' Wise and relevant words, but the small number of Sikh children in France can still not wear turbans to school, nor can the much larger number of Muslim girls wear headscarves.

Even as the complex and deeply problematic legacies of colonialism continue to shape our world, we are faced with the equally complex effects of globalization, which now appears irreversible. It is imperative, therefore, that those at the receiving end of the often imperceptible project of co-option, whether on home ground or as minorities in their adopted countries, preserve and reassert their cultural identity. Nations and peoples that do not, will be relentlessly homogenized. However, this very process will unleash huge tensions: Societies may be unable to resist homogenization, but there is always a remembered past, which creates deep resentments against the homogenizing powers. Such resentment will eventually express itself in religious extremism or atavistic and fanatical nationalism that strengthens fundamentalist leaders. The 'clash of civilizations' is then inevitable.

The flashpoints of the future may appear to be political. But the real causes are rooted in the unresolved issues of culture and identity.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book has taken me over four years to write and has involved rigorous research, including several hours spent at the British Library in London. Writing is a lonely pursuit, and I was able to stay the course and complete this book because I believe, as do many others I have met and talked to, that such a project is relevant to the urgently needed debate on issues of culture and identity in a globalizing world, specifically in the context of India and all other formerly colonized countries. I have had the opportunity to interact with a great many people across the world, and I am grateful for their insights. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the entire Penguin team, but most emphatically to Ravi Singh who meticulously—and often tyrannically!—edited the book. I would also like to thank Mohammad Khaliq who assisted me in keeping track of the thousands of press clippings I dipped into as part of my research. Finally, and as always, I am indebted to the understanding of my wife Renuka, who gave me the space and the encouragement to pursue my writing in the midst of an exceptionally demanding professional assignment in New Delhi. To my daughter, Batasha, and my son, Vedanta, I can only express my sympathies for the innumerable occasions when I used them as sounding boards to bounce off my ideas. My eldest daughter, Manvi, married and left for America just when I began the writing. She, therefore, largely escaped this persecution.

NOTES

1. Choosing Exile

1. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 211
2. Ibid, p. 207
3. George Otto Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 378-79
4. Quoted in *The Asian Age*, 22 April 2006
5. This was suggested by Dr Karan Singh in a letter to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
6. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin, 2003), p. 215

2. The Imperishable Empire

1. Macaulay, Thomas Babington, *Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 4 (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/2170)
2. George Otto Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, op cit, p. 351
3. From Macaulay's Minute on Education
4. William Jones, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 34
5. John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian* (Secker & Warburg, 1973), p. 359
6. Ibid, p. 390
7. Ibid, p. 398
8. British Parliamentary Papers, XXXII (1852-53), pp. 263-64
9. Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (Little, Brown, 1997), p. 158
10. Ibid, p. 157
11. An Account of Sir Thomas Roe's Embassy to the Court of Jahangir, British Library
12. John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, op cit, p. 344
13. Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study & British Rule in India* (Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 51

14. This document, and other details relating to Rammohan Roy's life, are sourced from V. Mahadevan and S.K. Krishnamurthi's book *Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord William Bentinck* (Longmans, 1929), and R.C. Mazumdar's learned essay on Roy, brought out by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, in 1972
15. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p. 96
16. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (University of California Press, 1998), p. 22
17. Anand A. Yang, 'Whose Sati: Widow Burning in Early-Nineteenth-Century India', *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, Ed. Tanika Sarkar and Sumit Sarkar (Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 28
18. Ibid
19. Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions*, op cit
20. George Smith, *The Life of William Carey* (The Echo Library, 2006), p. 162
21. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit
22. Q. Hyder, S. Jafri, *Ghalib and his Poetry*, (Popular Prakashan, 1970), p. 40
23. Ibid, p. 30
24. John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, op cit, p. 410
25. Quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, op cit, p. 6
26. John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, op cit, p. 409
27. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p. 49
28. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, op cit, p. 139
29. John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, op cit, p. 408
30. Ibid, p. 403
31. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *A Passage to England*, p. 188
32. Quoted in Ashis Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology—Essays in Politics and Culture* (New Delhi, 1980), p. 60

3. Macaulay's Legacy

1. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Bodley Head, 1936), p. 23
2. Ibid, p. 29
3. Ibid, pp. 3, 5, 24
4. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Navjivan, 1958), pp. 42-43
5. Mahatma Gandhi, *Constructive Programme* (Navjivan, 1944), p. 16
6. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Asia Publishing House, 1967) pp. 413-414
7. Lord Mountbatten, *Reflections on The Transfer of Power and Jawaharlal Nehru* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 12
8. Constituent Assembly Debates, *Official Debates Vol. 1* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 269
9. V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (Penguin, 1968), p. 213
10. *Outlook*, 27 October 2008
11. *The Indian Express*, Sunday, 22 Februrary 2009
12. Sheldon Pollock, *The Real Classical Languages Debate*, in *The Hindu*, 27 November 2008

13. Ibid
14. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (Heinemann, 1986), p. 13
15. Stephen David, *India Today*, sourced from http://www.india-today.com/webexclusive/dispatch/2001 1222/david.html
16. Sourced from http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/549
17. Nirmal Verma, in *Vishva Bazar Mein Hindi*, Ed: Mahipal Singh and Devendra Mishra, (Vani Prakasham, 2008), p. 19
18. V.G. Kiernan, quoted in John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay*, op cit, p. 358
19. Namvar Singh, in *Vishva Bazar Mein Hindi*, op cit, p. 16
20. U.R. Ananthmurthy in the Sumitra Chishti Memorial Lecture delivered in New Delhi on 2 March 2009, and reported in *The Indian Express*, 3 March 2009

4. Colonial Amnesia: A Tale of Two Cities

1. Charles Lutyens in the *New Delhi Newsletter*, The Lutyens Trust
2. Ibid
3. John Commins, Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. The excerpts from Lutyens letters quoted subsequently are all from this book (*The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his Wife Lady Emily*) and only the page numbers are indicated for reference purposes.
7. p. 279
8. p. 386
9. p. 253
10. p. 247
11. p. 248
12. p. 238
13. p. 232
14. pp. 239-40
15. p. 241
16. p. 276
17. p. 276
18. p. 419
19. p. 251
20. p. 271
21. p. 279
22. pp. 268-69
23. p. 292
24. p. 295
25. p. 323
26. p. 332

27. p. 280
28. p. 250
29. p. 416
30. p. 414
31. p. 280
32. p. 271
33. p. 419
34. Quoted in *New Delhi Newsletter*, The Lutyens Trust
35. Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi*, (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 186
36. Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires (1803-1931)* (Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 178
37. Ibid, p. 179
38. Ibid, p. 180
39. Thomas R Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p. 87
40. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 267
41. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, op cit, p. 426
42. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, op cit, p. 509
43. Ibid, p. 510
44. Nehru, *An Autobiography*, op cit, p. 429
45. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, op cit, p. 510
46. Ibid, p. 513
47. Quoted by Barkha Dutt in the *Hindustan Times*, 12 February 2008
48. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, op cit, p. 429
49. Gautam Bhatia, *Punjabi Baroque and other Memories of Architecture*, (Penguin, 1994), p. 231
50. Ibid, p. 231
51. Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier: The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial India* (Mapin, 2002), p. 27
52. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Second Series), NMML, Vol 28, p. 26
53. Ibid, p. 29
54. Nehru's speech at the inaugural ceremony of Chandigarh quoted in Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, op cit, p. 27.
55. Nehru's speech at the Institution of Engineers quoted in Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, op cit, p. 19
56. Letter to Swaran Singh, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, op cit, Vol. 19, p. 476
57. Letter to Chief Minister of Punjab, Partap Singh Kairon, 4 November 1960 (Chandigarh Museum Archives)
58. Quoted in Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, op cit, p. 150
59. See Doshi's interview in *Le Corbusier: From Marseilles to Chandigarh*, brought out by the Embassy of France in New Delhi on the occasion of the exhibition on Corbusier, November 2007, p. 28

60. Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier*, op cit, p. 148
61. Note to Planning Commission, 4 April 1952, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, op cit, Vol 18, p. 115
62. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, op cit, pp. 27-28
63. Gautam Bhatia, *Punjabi Baroque*, op cit, pp. 246-47
64. Gautam Bhatia, *Silent Spaces and other Stories of Architecture*, (Penguin, 1994) p. 111
65. Ibid, pp. 112-14
66. Gautam Bhatia, *Punjabi Baroque*, op cit, p. 249

5. Creativity and Distortion

1. Makarand Paranjape, *SABDA: Text and Interpretation of Indian Thought*, Ed.Santosh K. Sareen and Makarand Paranjape (Mantra Books, 2004), p. 133
2. Kapila Vatsyayana, *Bharata: The Natyasastra* (Sahitya Akademi, 1999)
3. Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 44
4. Ibid, p. 45
5. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p. 90
6. Sir Thomas Raleigh (ed), *Lord Curzon in India*, (London, 1906), p. 182
7. W. Erskine, *Account of the Cave Temples of Elephanta* (TLSB, I, 1819), p. 198
8. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p. 92
9. Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, op cit, p. 158
10. Ibid, p. vii
11. E.B. Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India* (The Theosophist Press, 1912)
12. Karsandas Mulji, *History of the Sect of Maharajas, or Vallabhacharyas in Western India*, (London, 1865), Appendix
13. Quoted by Barbara Miller, 'The Divine Duality of Radha and Krishna', in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort*, (Berkeley Religious Studies, 1982), p. 25
14. *Outlook*, 17 September 2007
15. Shakti Maira, *Towards Ananda: Rethinking Indian Art and Aesthetics* (Penguin, 2006), p. 22 .
16. A Ministry of Education, which dealt also with Culture, was set up right after 1947; the three apex academies, Sahitya Akademi for literature, Lalit Kala Akademi for the arts, and Sangeet-Natak Akademi for dance and theatre, were established soon thereafter. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), dealing primarily with cultural diplomacy, was founded in 1950
17. The other classical dances are Mohiniattam and Kathakali from Kerala, Kuchipudi from Andhra Pradesh, Odissi from Orissa, Manipuri from Manipur, Sattariya from Assam, and Kathak which amalgamates Islamic influences and is popular in the North.
18. Leela Venkataraman, *Dance in India*, (Indian Horizons, Vol 53, Summer 2006), pp. 24-25

19. Ibid, p. 25
20. Daksha Sheth, *To the Beat of a Different Drummer*, (Indian Horizons, Vol. 53, Summer 2006), p. 40
21. Gunnar Myrdal, *An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, Vol. 3, (Pantheon, 1968), pp. 1645-46
22. Sandeep Unnithan and Deepa Deosthalee, 'The Great Bollywood Rip-off' in *The Indian Express* (blog on the website)
23. Muzaffar Ali, 'Indian Cinema Has Lost the Plot' in the *Times of India*, 22 March 2009
24. Pan Nalin, in the *Times of India*, 16 July 2006
25. David Barboza, in *The New York Times*, 11 March 2009

6. The Empire at Your Threshold

1. Robert Winder, *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*, (Little, Brown, 2004), p. 290
2. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, (Palgrave, 2000) p. 204
3. Interview in the *Hindustan Times*, 29 January 2008
4. Norman S. Miwambo, in *From Outside In: Refugees and British Society*, Ed. Nushin Arbabzadah, (Arcadia Books, 2007) p. 89
5. Yasmin Alibhai Brown, *After Multiculturalism* (The Foreign Policy Centre, UK, 2000), p. 1
6. Ibid, p. 11
7. Ziauddin Sardar, in *What is British?* (British Council, 2004), p. 10
8. Ibid
9. Ziauddin Sardar, *Balti Britain* (Granta, 2008) p. 8
10. Ibid, p. 13
11. Ibid, p. 12
12. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (Penguin/Allen Lane, 2006), p. 4
13. Ibid, p. 5
14. Ibid, pp. 159-60
15. Sudhir and Katharina Kakar, *The Indians: Portrait of a People* (Penguin/Viking, 2007), pp. 1-2
16. Ibid, p. 5
17. Ibid, p. 5
18. *From Outside In*, op cit, p. 58
19. Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together* (Continuum, 2007), p 3
20. Sudhir Kakar, *The Indians*, op cit, p., 1
21. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, op cit, p. 159
22. Gulzar, *Selected Poems*, translated by Pavan K. Varma (Penguin, 2008), p. 23
23. V.S. Naipaul, *A Writer's People: Ways of Looking and Feeling* (Picador, 2007) p. 42
24. *From Outside In*, op cit, p. 3
25. Ibid, p. 147

7. Within the Global Village: Asymmetry and Co-option

1. The *Times of India*, 19 May 2007
2. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, op cit, p. 164
3. Quoted by Geoff Dyer in the *Financial Times*, 16 June 2007
4. Qui Baoxing, Deputy Minister for Construction, quoted by Geoff Dyer, op cit
5. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, op cit, pp. 302-03
6. See Ashutosh Varshney and Steven Wilkinson's study of Hindu-Muslim riots during the period 1960-93 for the Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (1996)
7. See Sabrina Tavermise in the *International Herald Tribune*, 13 November 2008
8. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (Free Press, 1995) pp. 33-34
9. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 22-29
10. Thomas R. Metcalfe, 'Ideologies of the Raj', op cit, p 61
11. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, op cit, p. 150
12. Ibid, p. 150
13. *The Asian Age*, 18 August 2005
14. Charles Smith, *Fifty Years with Mountbatten*, (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), p. 79
15. Lord Louis Mountbatten, *Reflections on The Transfer of Power and Jawaharlal Nehru* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 32
16. Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer*, op cit, p. 353

INDEX

Praise for THE GREAT INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS

'[An] erudite, thoughtful, perceptive and elegantly written study...Not only the most outstanding non-fiction book of [the year], it is among the best that have come out of India in the past two decades'
—*Hindustan Times*

'A lucid book...The first popular social history of the class that has shaped India's recent past and still controls the key to its future. This book...brings out the harsh truth, offers a critique and hints at what the way out could be'
—*The Hindu*

'An honest and courageous account...an interior journey of a sensitive writer to discover and understand the loss of innocence and idealism of a class and a generation'
—*Business Standard*

Praise for BEING INDIAN: WHY THE 21st CENTURY WILL BE INDIA'S

'[A] masterful delineation of the urban Indian's character or the lack of it... vivid, sure-footed and at times tongue-in-cheek'
—*Frontline*

'A fascinating and far from rose-tinted guide for anyone heading to this vast country or who simply wants to know how the 21st century is going to play out'
—*Sunday Times*

'A compelling thesis ... [Varma] uses a clever mix of history, religion and personal examples to give this book depth and clarity'
—*India Today*